

OPINION 6
CHARTING A PATH FOR
HINDU-MUSLIM UNITY

WORLD 8
UN CHIEF CALLS FOR RESUMED
FUNDING OF PALESTINIAN AID AGENCY

MONEY 10
INDIA GAS DEMAND TO RISE
6 PER CENT IN 2024: IEA

Established 1864
Published From
DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR
RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH
DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA
Late City Vol. 34 Issue 28
*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

NEW DELHI, MONDAY JANUARY 29, 2024; PAGES 12 & 3



the pioneer

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Bihar Political Pot Cools Down

Nitish Kumar sworn in as Bihar CM



JD(U) leader Nitish Kumar takes oath as Bihar CM during the swearing-in ceremony of new State Government, at Raj Bhavan in Patna PTI

Choudhary, Vijendra Yadav, and Shrawan Kumar also took oath, along with former CM Jitan Ram Manjhi-led Hindustan Awam Morcha's Santosh Kumar Sumar and Independent legislator Sumit Singh. Other members of the council of Ministers will be decided in a day or two, sources said. Referring to his party's alliance with the NDA, Nitish said, "We will stay together. Eight leaders took oath as Ministers today, and the rest will be inducted soon." Responding to Tejashwi's statement, "JD(U) will be finished in 2024," Nitish said, "We work for the development and progress of Bihar. We will keep doing the same, nothing else. Tejashwi was not doing anything. Now I am back where I was before (in the NDA), and now there is no question of going anywhere."

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DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ PATNA/NEW DELHI

Ending a week-long period of speculation, JD(U) president Nitish Kumar did another political somersault on Sunday, this time securing the backing of the BJP and re-appointing himself as Chief Minister by taking the oath for a record ninth time to lead the Bihar Government. Eighteen months ago, Nitish had parted ways with the BJP, despite winning the 2020 Assembly elections as part of the NDA coalition. He joined the RJD-Congress coalition in August 2022, leading the Government with RJD's Tejashwi Yadav as his deputy. After Nitish's coronation, Tejashwi said it marked the end of Nitish style of politics and the demise of JD(U) in Bihar. Governor Rajendra Arlekar administered the oath of office and secrecy at the Raj Bhavan in Patna, with BJP president JP Nadda in attendance, after a well-orchestrated change of regime over 72 hours in the crucial State that holds 40 Lok Sabha seats. Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserted that the newly sworn-in NDA Government in Bihar, led by Nitish, will spare no effort for the State's development. Alongside Nitish, BJP leaders Vijay Kumar Sinha, State BJP chief Samrat Choudhary took oath as Deputy CMs, and BJP's Prem Kumar took oath as a Minister. JD(U) members Vijay Kumar



Samrat, Vijay appointed Deputy Chief Ministers

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Deputy Chief Ministers Samrat Choudhary (54) and Vijay Kumar Sinha (64) on Sunday emerged as dark horse in the second generation leadership of BJP in Bihar. Choudhary, who belongs to backward caste, is likely to get Home portfolio in the new Nitish Kumar Cabinet while Sinha is from upper caste. Other party leaders who are likely to be made Ministers in the new Government are Nitin Nabin, Shah Nawaz Hussain, Rampreet Paswan, Neeraj Singh Babloo. BJP leader Sushil Kumar Modi, who was deputy to Nitish Kumar when the BJP and the JD(U) was in an alliance in the

State, is wanted back in the State. Sources said Bihar has as many as 40 Lok Sabha seats, making it very significant politically. The bigger picture appears to be the factor that led the BJP to welcome Nitish, infamous for his flip-flops, back into the NDA fold. As the country gears up for the Lok Sabha polls next year, the BJP now appears a formidable force armed with the charisma of Prime Minister Modi and meticulous election machinery. Addressing a Press conference in Patna, shortly after he attended Kumar's swearing in with his party as an alliance partner, BJP national president JP Nadda asserted that NDA will "sweep" the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

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Final nail in INDIA coffin

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

With the current jolt by the JD(U) which till a day earlier was the harbinger of larger Opposition coalition INDIA Bloc landed in a trouble on Sunday with its chief architect Nitish Kumar shook hands with the NDA after his aspirations to take on BJP's tallest leader Prime

Minister Narendra Modi did not materialise even after nine months of his engagement with the Congress led stakeholders of Opposition Bloc. Days after the Trinamool Congress-led West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee poured cold waters on the grouping by announcing to go solo in Lok Sabha polls and there shall be no truck with the

Congress, the JD(U) too said the alliance was collapsing due to the grand old party's indifferent attitude to regional allies. The Aam Aadmi Party too last week announced to contest alone in Punjab. Which means after West Bengal, Bihar, Punjab gone only hope remains in Jharkhand even as the tantrums of both the Akhilesh Yadav-led Samajwadi

Party and the Congress is visible in Uttar Pradesh which accounts for 80 Lok Sabha seats. Akhilesh, however, has announced to share 11 seats with the Congress, against the latter's demand of 20. As Nitish tendered his resignation on Sunday morning, he explained that things in the INDIA Bloc have not been working out.

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No respite from winter chill



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A day after bright sunshine, Delhiites once again woke up to a foggy morning and extreme cold on Sunday, causing delays in flights, trains, and other modes of transportation. The minimum temperature was recorded at 6 degrees Celsius, two notches below the season's average, while the maximum temperature settled at 18.6 degrees Celsius, normal for the season's average. Mayur Vihar was the coldest area in Delhi, recording the maximum temperature at 14.6 degrees Celsius, the lowest in the city. The India Meteorological

Department (IMD) has forecast dense fog for the next five days, coupled with cold conditions for the next two days in North India. According to the IMD, from January 31 to February 1, there will be a generally cloudy sky with light rain or drizzle. From January 28 to 30, the city may witness moderate fog conditions. The Air Quality Index (AQI) was recorded at 324 at 9 am, settling at 384 in the "very poor" category at 6 pm, according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). The IMD weather forecast predicts that the Western Himalayan Region will be

impacted by a new Western Disturbance starting on January 28. From January 31, the Western Himalayan region and the adjacent plains of Northwest India are expected to be affected by another disturbance in the west. "Light/moderate isolated to scattered rainfall/snowfall is very likely over Uttarakhand and light rainfall over Punjab, Chandigarh, Haryana, west Uttar Pradesh from January 31 to February 2," the Met office said in a statement. Over the next two days, these weather systems are predicted to bring light, isolated rainfall or snowfall to parts of Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Gilgit, Baltistan, Muzaffarabad, and Himachal Pradesh. From January 29 to February 1, there will be moderate, scattered to fairly widespread rainfall or snowfall. The IMD also issues a warning, saying on January 28, dense to extremely dense fog conditions are likely to be present over a large portion of East Uttar Pradesh as well as over certain areas of Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, West Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar for a few hours during the night and morning. Over the next three days, the area is expected to see isolated pockets of dense fog."

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One dead after stage collapses during jagran at Kalkaji temple

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A woman died, and 17 devotees were injured when a stage set up for a religious function, attended by singer B Praak, at the Kalkaji temple here, collapsed on Sunday around 12:30 am. The deceased has been identified as Tina, a resident of Tughlakabad extension. According to police, a 'jagran' (religious function) was organised at the Mahant Parishad of Kalkaji temple on Saturday, and around 1,600 people attended it. The temple management had hired event planners to organise the jagran. No arrests have been made so far, police sources said. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal condoled the death of the woman and wished for the speedy recovery of the injured. "The accident that happened last night during a 'jagran' at the Kalkaji temple is tragic. A woman has died; may her soul rest in peace. I wish for the speedy recovery of the 17 injured people," Kejriwal said in a post on 'X



A collapsed platform at Kalkaji Mandir, in New Delhi, on Sunday. At least one person was killed and 17 others suffered injuries after the platform collapsed during a jagran programme, according to officials PTI

in Hindi: "I appeal to the people of Delhi to take special care of safety standards in any kind of big event and make arrangements in such a way that no untoward incident happens," he added. Deputy Commissioner of Police (southeast) Rajesh Deo said no prior permission

had been granted for the event at the temple. "However, sufficient staff was deployed to maintain law and order. There was a gathering of around 1,500 to 1,600 people at around 12:30 am on Sunday," he said. According to the police, an elevated wooden platform supported by an iron frame

was set up near the main stage for the families of the organisers and VIPs. Around 12:30 am, the elevated platform broke right from the middle as it could not bear the weight of the people sitting on it and collapsed, injuring those seated on it and close to it on the ground, the DCP said.

An eye-witness, Varun, said there was a large gathering at the temple as singer B Praak was present. "All of a sudden, the stage collapsed, and those who were sitting close to the stage received injuries. The singer had left by that time," he said. Another person who was present at the temple said he heard a loud noise and saw people running out. "It was a stampede-like situation. Everyone was running for their lives. I was outside the temple when I got to know that the stage collapsed and some people received injuries," he said. Among those who had gone to attend the function but returned home early because of the huge rush at the temple, 20-year-old Suman Kanojia of Chirag Delhi said, "I went there with a relative at around 10 pm and returned by 11 pm because it was so crowded. We thought of staying there a little longer but thankfully we didn't." There was a huge crowd. There were temple volunteers around to manage the crowd but no policemen, Kanojia said.

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Ram rule inspired Constitution makers: Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Sunday that the rule of Lord Ram was a source of inspiration for the Constitution makers, noting that pictures of him, Sita, and Lakshman adorned the pages of the Constitution. In the first Mann Ki Baat broadcast of this year, Modi said the consecration ceremony at the Ram temple in Ayodhya brought people across the country together, making the collective strength of the country visible. "And that is why, on January 22 in Ayodhya, I talked about 'Dev to Desh' and 'Ram to Rashtira'," he said.

"Everyone's feeling is the same, everyone's devotion is the same. Ram is in everyone's words, Ram is in everyone's heart," Modi said. During this period, many people sang Ram bhajans and dedicated them to Lord Ram. On January 22 evening, the whole country lit 'Ram Jyoti' and celebrated Diwali, he noted. "During this time, the collective strength of the country was visible, forming the basis of our pledge for a developed India," the Prime Minister said. The collective power will take the country to new heights of progress, he said. In his broadcast, he urged young voters to register themselves so that they could exercise their franchise and



lauded the growing participation of people in voting at a time when many countries in the world are seeing a downward trend. Nearly 45 per cent of votes were cast in the first national elections in 1951-52, and the percentage has been going up while the number of electorates has surged to 96 crore, over three times the US population, he said. In the monthly broadcast, Modi noted that the absence of a common language for the terminology of diseases, treatments, and medicines in alternative medicines like Ayurveda, Siddha, or Unani was a longstanding problem, and said a solution has been now found. He said, "I am happy to share

that the Ministry of AYUSH has categorised the data and terminology related to Ayurveda, Siddha, and Unani medicine, with the help of the World Health Organization as well. Through the efforts of both, the terminology related to disease and treatment in Ayurveda, Unani, and Siddha medicine has been codified." He said an advantage of this would be that if patients go to another doctor with their slip, the doctor will get complete information. "That slip will help one in knowing one's illness, treatment, what medicines one has been taking, for how long the treatment has been going on, what things one is allergic to," he said.

In a reference to the recent Padma awards, Modi said many of those bestowed the honour were those who worked at grassroots and away from the limelight to make big changes in society. "I am very happy that the system of Padma awards has transformed completely in the last decade. Now it has become people's Padma," he said. The contribution of each one of the Padma awardees is an inspiration for the countrymen, he said and added that many of them were those who brought glory to the country in the world of classical dance, classical music, folk dance, theatre, and bhajans.

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BJP slams MCD for prohibiting use of MLA funds on unauthorised colonies

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi BJP has condemned the AAP-led MCD for passing an order on the instruction of the party supremo Arvind Kejriwal and Mayor Shelly Oberoi prohibiting use of MLA funds on development works in unauthorised colonies and group housing societies. Delhi BJP Spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor on Sunday said that Aam Aadmi Party supremo Arvind Kejriwal is averse to any development work in Delhi's Unauthorised Colonies & Group Housing Societies after 2022 MCD elections. Kapoor has said that in 2018 when BJP was in service in MCD at that time Arvind Kejriwal's cabinet had passed an order directing MCD to start development fund in unauthorised colonies &



through MLA fund in group housing societies.

In wider public interest BJP administration in MCD

accepted the order but once 2022 MCD Election came out

wherein AAP did not fair well in wards of unauthorised colonies and group housing societies Kejriwal decided to stop welfare works through MLA funds in these areas and for this Kejriwal and the Mayor have made MCD Addl. Commissioner bring out an order prohibiting MCD from doing development works in unauthorised colonies & group housing societies citing rules not allowing MCD to not to do development works therein. Delhi BJP Spokesperson has said that it is shocking to note that when BJP was in service in MCD the CM Kejriwal wanted MCD to do development works in unauthorised colonies as well as group housing societies but when he is in power in both Delhi Government and MCD the Additional Commissioner has passed order prohibiting development works in the two areas.

Need more focused approach to resolve Noida woes: BJP

PTI ■ NOIDA

Senior BJP leader Gopal Krishna Agarwal has highlighted the problems faced by home buyers, industries, and residents' bodies in Noida and Greater Noida, saying a more committed and focused approach was required to resolve their issues. Agarwal also pointed out the missing panchayati raj system of governance in several villages here and batted for its revival as he launched the 'Sankalp 2024: Vision Document', a white paper on the issues concerning Gautam Buddha Nagar Lok Sabha constituency and its possible solutions. "There are several problems that the residents of Gautam Buddha Nagar face, including home buyers, industrialists, residents' welfare associations, and apartment owners' associations," the BJP national spokesperson said at a programme in Greater Noida.



"There is potential in the district... But when we talk about the problems of Gautam Buddha Nagar, then somewhere the matters get stuck at the level of all three local authorities. A more focused approach is needed to resolve them," Agarwal said. He pointed out that Noida has developed as an urban area but there were some rural bodies where panchayati raj

systems prevailed for local governance. However, after land acquisition by local industrial development authorities, that third tier of governance in rural areas ceased to exist. "There is a need to work towards that also," he told a gathering of hundreds of people, including representatives of local residents' bodies from villages and societies, and industries. "This vision document is for resolving those issues. It presents examples of the work style of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, how he gets into the depth of a matter and works on solving a problem," Agarwal said. "This vision document highlights the problems of Gautam Buddha Nagar and also provides a roadmap for their solutions. What action plan is required to resolve them, whether it is for two lakh home buyers or others," he added.



Artists, who participated in the 75th Republic Day parade, perform during Bharat Parv festival at Red Fort

Mayor moves SC over transfer of power of standing panel

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Mayor Shelly Oberoi has moved the Supreme Court seeking a direction to allow the functions of the Standing Committee to be exercised by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) till the panel is constituted. The development comes less than a fortnight after Oberoi during a special session of the MCD proposed vesting the powers of the standing committee in the House amid a ruckus with the BJP members opposing the move, which they alleged was "illegal and unconstitutional". The plea, in which the Lieutenant Governor's (LG) Office is the respondent, sought a direction for the smooth functioning of the civic body. It said that on May 17, 2023, the top court had reserved its verdict on a plea challenging the appointment of nominated persons in the MCD without the



aid and advice of the Delhi government. "The adjudication of the legality of the nominated persons' appointments will directly and substantially impact the election of 12 out of 18 members of the Standing Committee, i.e. It will directly determine the special majority within it. Thus, the Standing Committee could not be constituted yet," Oberoi said in her plea. It said that while the judgement of the court is awaited, the functions of the Standing Committee like granting approval to the MCD Commissioner to enter into any contract involving an expenditure greater than Rs 5 crore and other budgetary

issues, have come to a halt. "The prevailing situation has affected a range of governance functions of the MCD, from the procurement of textbooks and medical supplies for MCD's schools and health centres to the maintenance of public parks, public toilets, and other amenities," the plea said. Oberoi said that MCD has passed a resolution dated January 15, 2024, resolving that approvals for contracts involving expenditure greater than rupees five crores, including where approval will be normally routed through the Standing Committee, be taken by the competent authorities directly from the Corporation, with a view to alleviate the situation and preserve the interests of the citizens in Delhi. "In view of the petitioner's constitutional responsibilities to the citizens of Delhi, the present petition has been preferred to seek a direction that

the functions of the Standing Committee — pending the adjudication of the legality of the process of appointment of its electors — be exercised by the House of the MCD, i.e. The 'Corporation' composed of all the elected councillors as defined in Section 3(3)(a) of the DMC Act," the plea said. The plea said that since the MCD is the body superior to the Standing Committee, in both power and accountability, it would be appropriate for the functions of the Committee to be exercised by the MCD in its meetings, till such time the panel is legally constituted. "The petitioner is the Mayor of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi and is instituting the present petition to seek appropriate directions for the smooth functioning of the MCD during the pendency of the constitution of the Standing Committee on account of the peculiar circumstances," the plea said.

AAP to fight Haryana Assembly seats on its own, says Kejriwal To contest LS polls as part of INDIA bloc



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI/JIND

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday said his party will contest all the 90 assembly seats in Haryana on its own, but the Lok Sabha polls will be fought as part of the INDIA bloc. The Lok Sabha polls are due in April-May while the assembly elections are due in October. "Today people only have trust in one party, which is the Aam Aadmi Party. On one side, they see Punjab, and on the other, our government in Delhi. Today Haryana is seeking a big change. In Delhi and Punjab, people made this big change earlier and now people there are happy," he said at his party's 'Badlaav Jansabha' in Haryana's Jind. The AAP will contest all the 90 assembly seats in Haryana on its own, but the Lok Sabha polls will be fought as part of the INDIA bloc, Kejriwal said. "AAP will contest on all 90 seats and we will form the next government in Haryana and make it number 1 state in the country," he said. Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann was also present at the event. Kejriwal said Haryana is looking for a "big change" as the people of the state are "fed

up" with all the parties that have ruled here. They have tested all the other parties and these parties have only filled their own coffers, the AAP national convener alleged. Only the AAP can provide round-the-clock power supply and other facilities to people like it has done in Delhi and Punjab, he said. "Can the Congress, the BJP and the JJP do this? They cannot. Only the AAP can do this," Kejriwal said. The Delhi chief minister said the rival parties used to say that if people will get zero bills then they won't get power supply. "There used to be seven to eight hours power cuts daily earlier in Delhi and Punjab, but now the people are getting round-the-clock power supply. In Haryana too, we will end your power cuts," Kejriwal said. The BJP-JJP coalition is in power in Haryana and its government is led by Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar. Targeting the BJP-led Centre, the Delhi chief minister accused it of using all its might to arrest him and said he is not scared of going to jail. Kejriwal alleged that "they have used all its might to arrest him." "They have left the Income Tax Department, the CBI, the ED and the Delhi Police after me,"

Kejriwal said. "I am not scared of going to jail. I belong to Haryana and I want to tell them that do not try to scare 'Haryanawala'. I am the son of Haryana. I have the blood of Haryana inside me, I am not scared of jail," he added. It seems like the country's biggest terrorist is Kejriwal, he said. "I am not a terrorist. These people are terrorists who have kept inflation so much high. Today, inflation is the biggest terror in every household. People are not able to meet their household expenses," Kejriwal said. Kejriwal is "kattar imaandaar" and "kattar desh bhakt", the AAP leader asserted. "I am Lord Ram's and Lord Hanuman's follower. With inspiration from 'Ram Rajya', we are running our administration in Delhi and Punjab. We are not here for power, but to serve," he said. "Taking on the BJP-led Centre, Kejriwal said, "Today, I want to tell them that they want to finish Kejriwal. They are targeting me... I have five demands which are of 140 crore people of this country. You fulfil my five demands, I will leave politics." "I have not come here for politics. I have not come here to make money. I have not come here to be a minister or chief minister," he added.

We have got good candidates under reserved category, says JNU VC

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Amid criticism of UGC's draft guidelines on filling of reserved posts in higher education institutes, Jawaharlal Nehru University Vice-Chancellor Santishree D Pandit on Sunday said that no posts in the varsity have been "de-reserved". The new draft guidelines by the University Grants Commission that were in the public domain for feedback from stakeholders till January 28 suggest that a vacancy reserved for SC, ST or OBC candidates can be declared unreserved if enough candidates from these categories are not available. The draft guidelines have received criticism from several quarters, though the Ministry of Education (MoE) on Sunday clarified that no reserved posts can be de-reserved. Issuing a clarification, Pandit, in a statement on X, said "As JNU VC I want to reiterate to all stakeholders that no posts in JNU have been de-reserved. We have got very good candidates under the reserved cate-



gory." The statement mentioned that JNU follows the reservation policy as stipulated by the Centre and has an existing office memorandum which states that no de-reservation is allowed for any category of vacancies for SC, ST or OBC. "The interchangeability of these categories are also not allowed," the statement added, citing that even the Supreme Court has expressed the same sentiment against the interchangeability of vacancies reserved for these categories. The Congress alleged there is a "conspiracy" to end reservations given to SCs, STs and OBCs in posts in higher education institutions. The JNU Students' Union (JNUSU) has announced a protest against UGC Chairman M Jagadesh Kumar on the issue on Monday. The JNUSU alleged that the new draft guidelines were "exclusionary" and an act of "scuttling of reservation in higher education institutes". The SFI Delhi State Committee has also called for a protest at the UGC headquarters on Monday. The draft 'Guidelines for Implementation of the Reservation Policy of the Government of India in Higher Education Institutes (HEIs)' were released in December last year.

Minor held for throwing acid at girl outside school in Burari

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A 16-year-old boy was apprehended on Sunday for allegedly throwing some acid-like substance at a girl, who he chose as his victim at random near a school in north Delhi's Burari area, police said. The attack took place on Wednesday around 1 pm when she had gone to pick her 10-year-old cousin from a school in the area's Shastrri Park Extension. The incident was reported the same day and an FIR was filed in the matter under section 326(b) and 341 of the Indian Penal Code at Burari Police Station. The chemical caused the girl a "burn-like sensation, itching and irritation on her eyes, neck, and nose," a senior police officer said. After the attack, the girl was taken to a government hospital in Burari. She was discharged after treatment, the officer said. Police formed three different teams to identify the assailant and nab him. However, since the victim

didn't know the attacker or had any previous brush with him made it hard for police to crack the case. "The victim, however, had no reported history of personal animosity, spurned advances, or any romantic involvement with a boy, making the incident appear as a blind case. "Unfortunately, there were no surveillance cameras at the site of the crime, which made the investigation not an easy task," Deputy Commissioner of Police (north) Manoj Kumar Meena said. One of the police teams focused on profiling the victim, examining her social media history, past contacts, and other relevant details. "Another team was tasked with reviewing CCTV footage from the six roads leading to the crime scene, creating a temporal map of the possible routes taken by a suspect," Meena said. The third team, in plain clothes, positioned itself near schools with a rough description of the attacker.

Man commits suicide by jumping in front of metro train

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A shocking video has surfaced on the internet in which a man is caught committing suicide by jumping in front of a moving train at Delhi's INA Metro Station on Saturday evening. The incident was caught on camera and the video of the incident is doing rounds on social media. It can be seen in the video that the man jumps on the track in the presence of many people on the station. The man spots the train coming to the platform, and to the surprise of the other commuters, he jumped in front of the train as soon as it reaches the platform. Commuters inside the station at the time were left stunned by what unfolded in front of their eyes within a



fraction of seconds. The deceased was identified as one Ajitej Singh — around 30-year-old — a resident of the national capital's Satya Niketan area. According to the police, late

on Saturday — around 7:38 pm — they received a Police Control Room (PCR) call about a person jumping in front of the metro. CCTV camera footage showed Singh jump in front of a Samaipur Badli-bound train from platform number two, police said. "Singh was identified through a call that came on his mobile phone," a senior police officer said. The dead body was shifted to

a mortuary for autopsy and further investigation is underway, the officer said. Metro services were impacted for about 15 to 20 minutes because of the same, a senior official of DMRC said. Many incidents of people committing suicide at Metro Station in Delhi has come to the fore in the recent past. Earlier in January, 2024, a young man died by suicide by jumping in front of a train at Mandi House metro station. As per reports, the deceased was identified as Ravi and he was a resident of Bihar. Before that, on July 3, 2023, a person committed suicide by jumping in front of a train in Delhi's Kailash Colony. The person who committed suicide was identified as 25-year-old Arjun Sharma. He was a resident of East of Kailash.

New legislations will strengthen India of tomorrow: Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said the government was modernising laws keeping in view the present context and asserted that these legislations will further strengthen tomorrow's India. Addressing the 75th anniversary celebrations of the Supreme Court here, he said that with the enactment of three new criminal justice laws, India's legal, policing and investigative systems entered a new era. "It is important to ensure that the transition to the new laws from the ones dating back to hundreds of years is smooth. In this regard, we have already started training and capacity building work for government employees," the prime minister

said. Modi urged the Supreme Court to come forward to work towards the capacity building of other stakeholders. "An empowered judicial system is a part of 'Viksit Bharat'. The government is working continuously and taking many decisions to form a trusted judicial system. The Jan Vishwas Bill is a step in this direction. In the future, this will reduce the unnecessary burden on the judicial system," the prime minister said. He said that the law on mediation will lessen the burden on courts as the legislation will improve the alternative dispute resolution mechanism. The prime minister said the Supreme Court has strengthened India's vibrant democracy and given many important verdicts on individual rights

and freedom of speech which have given new direction to the country's socio-political milieu. "Today's economic policies of India will form the basis of tomorrow's bright India. The laws being made in India today will further strengthen tomorrow's bright India," the prime minister said. "Laws made today will brighten the future of India. With changes happening globally, the world's eyes are set on India, as the world's faith is growing stronger in India. In such times, it is important for India to take advantage of every opportunity given to it," Modi said. He also noted that last week the government had approved Rs 800 crore for the expansion of the Supreme Court building. In a lighter vein, Modi hoped



that no one moves a petition challenging the expansion of the top court's infrastructure. He also hinted that the

new Parliament building project was challenged in the courts. Prime Minister Modi underlined that ease of living, ease of doing business, travel and communication, and ease of justice were the nation's top priorities. "Ease of justice is the right of every Indian citizen and the Supreme Court of India, its medium," he said. To ensure last-mile justice delivery, the prime minister noted the recent decision on phase-III of the e-courts project to improve digital infrastructure of subordinate courts. Expressing happiness at the availability of decisions in a digital format and the beginning of the project of translating Supreme Court decision in local languages, Modi hoped for similar arrangements in other courts of the country.

He said the use technology may have teething troubles, but it expands the horizons to improve justice delivery. Modi also noted that India's first woman judge of the Supreme Court, Justice M Fathima Beevi, was recently given the Padma Bhushan. Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud, other judges of the apex court, top law officers and Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal were present. Modi also launched citizen-centric information and technology initiatives that include Digital Supreme Court Reports (Digi SCR), Digital Courts 2.0 and a new website of the Supreme Court. The Digital Supreme Court Reports (SCR) will make Supreme Court judgments available to the citizens of the

country free of cost and in electronic format. The key features of digital SCR are that all 519 volumes of the Supreme Court reports since 1950, covering 36,308 cases, shall be available in a digital format, bookmarked, user-friendly, and with open access. Digital Courts 2.0 application is a recent initiative under the e-Courts project to make court records available to the Judges of the district courts in electronic form. This is coupled with the use of artificial intelligence (AI) for transcribing speech to text on a real-time basis. The Prime Minister also launched the new website of the Supreme Court. The new website will be in bilingual format in English and Hindi and has been redesigned with a user-friendly interface.

Judiciary needs to begin difficult conversations: CJI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The judiciary's ability to remain relevant as an institution requires it to recognise challenges and begin "difficult conversations", Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud said on Sunday as he flagged issues like "adjournment culture" and long vacations. He also stressed on increasing the representation of marginalised sections and providing a level playing field to first-generation lawyers. The CJI was speaking at a function organised by the Supreme Court on the occasion of the inauguration of the Diamond Jubilee Year of the establishment of the apex court in the country. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was the chief guest for the occasion. The CJI also highlighted the demographic changes undergoing in India and said that women, traditionally under-represented in the legal profession, now constitute 36.3 per cent of the working strength of the district judiciary. CJI Chandrachud called for the inclusion of diverse sections of the population into the legal profession, noting the representation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes "is quite low both at the Bar as well as on the Bench".



Terming it as a "momentous occasion" in the history of the nation, CJI Chandrachud said that women can now be seen in important positions in India. "There is a focus on greater inclusion of the marginalised sections of society. Equally inspiring is the confidence of the younger population to succeed in their professional lives," he said. The Supreme Court of India came into existence on January 28, 1950. It initially functioned from the Parliament House before it moved to the present building here. CJI Chandrachud said, "Traditionally, the legal profession was a profession of elite men. Times have changed. Women, traditionally under-represented in the profession, now constitute 36.3 per cent of the working strength of the district judiciary." The CJI also flagged the structural issues affecting the judiciary, such as pendency of

cases, archaic procedures and the culture of adjournments, stressing that in the near future, these issues must be addressed. "Our effort in our work as judges and administrators must be to ensure dignity to the district judiciary, which is the first point of contact for citizens. "Our ability to remain relevant as an institution requires us to recognise challenges and begin difficult conversations," he said. The CJI said there is an urgent need to emerge from the adjournment culture to a culture of professionalism. "Second, we have to ensure that the length of oral arguments does not interminably delay judicial outcomes. "Third, the legal profession must provide a level playing field for first-generation lawyers - men, women and others from marginalised seg-

ments who have the will to work and the potential to succeed; and "Fourth, let us begin the conversation on long vacations and whether alternatives such as flexitime for lawyers and judges is possible," he said. He highlighted that in the recruitment examination for Junior Civil Judges conducted in several states like Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Uttar Pradesh, and Uttarakhand, more than 50 per cent of the selected candidates were women. CJI Chandrachud also highlighted the recent senior designation of advocates by the Supreme Court to a record number of women. "We, as judges and administrators, cannot be ignorant of these rising aspirations. "Before the beginning of 2024, only 12 women were designated as 'Senior Advocates' in the history of the Supreme Court over the last 74 years. Last week, the Supreme Court designated 11 women from different parts of the country as Senior Advocates at one selection," he said. The programme held in the Supreme Court premises was also attended by Union Minister of State of Law and Justice Arjun Ram Meghwal,

servicing and retired judges of the top court and the high courts and lawyers and law students. Attorney General R Venkataramani, Bar Council of India chairman Manan Kumar Mishra and Supreme Court Bar Association President Adish C Aggarwal also addressed the gathering. In his address, CJI Chandrachud said, "Our legitimacy will endure from the inclusion of diverse sections of the population in our system. Therefore, we need to make more efforts to bring different sections of the society into the legal profession. "For instance, the representation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is quite low both at the Bar as well as on the Bench." He added that it is the 75th year since the founding provided an opportunity to meet these challenges and step into the future with an honest assessment of our progress. "We must reflect on the journey that we have traversed and renew our pledge to uphold the Constitution within and beyond the courtrooms," the CJI said. The programme was also attended by the Chief Justices of Bangladesh, Bhutan, Mauritius, Nepal, and Sri Lanka.

No reserved posts can be dereserved, clarifies MoE

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Education (MoE) on Sunday clarified that no reserved posts can be de-reserved after draft guidelines by the University Grants Commission (UGC) proposed that any vacancy reserved for SC, ST and OBC candidates can be declared unreserved if enough candidates from these categories are not available. The 'Guidelines for Implementation of the Reservation Policy of the Government of India in Higher Education Institutes (HEIs)' are in the public domain for feedback from stakeholders. The draft guidelines have drawn flak from several quarters. The Congress alleged there is a "conspiracy" to end reservation given to SCs, STs and OBCs in posts in higher education institutions and that the Modi government is only doing "politics of symbolism" on the issues of Dalits, backward classes and tribals. The JNU Students' Union (JNUSU) has announced a protest against UGC Chairman M Jagadeesh Kumar on the issue on Monday. Kumar also clarified that there

has been no de-reservation of reserved category positions in Central Educational Institutions (CEI) in the past and there is going to be no such de-reservation. "Reservation in Central Educational Institutions is provided for all posts in direct recruitment in Teacher's cadre as per the Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Teachers' Cadre) Act, 2019. "After enactment of this Act, no reserved post is to be de-reserved. Ministry of Education has given directives to all the CEIs to fill up the vacancies strictly as per the 2019 ACT," the Ministry of Education wrote on X. The UGC chairman also posted: "This is to clarify that there has been no de-reservation of reserved category positions in Central Educational Institutions in the past and there is going to be no such de-reservation. "It is important for all HEIs to ensure that all backlog positions in the reserved category are filled up through concerted efforts." According to new draft guidelines by the UGC: "A vacancy reserved for SC or ST or OBC cannot be filled by a candidate other than an SC or ST or

OBC candidate, as the case may be. "However, a reserved vacancy may be declared unreserved by following the procedure of de-reservation where after, it can be filled as an unreserved vacancy." "There is a general ban on de-reservation of reserved vacancies in case of direct recruitment. However, in rare and exceptional cases when a vacancy in a Group A service cannot be allowed to remain vacant in public interest, the University concerned may prepare a proposal for de-reservation of the vacancy giving the following information: The proposal will be required to list -- efforts made to fill up the post; reasons why it cannot be allowed to remain vacant and justification for de-reservation. "The proposal for de-reservation in case of Group C or D should go to the Executive Council of the University and in case of Group A or B should be submitted to the Ministry of Education, giving full details, for necessary approval. After receiving the approval, the post may be filled and reservation may be carried forward," the draft guidelines added.

Panel to review antidefection law to be constituted soon, says Birla

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/MUMBAI

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Sunday said a committee to review anti-defection law will be constituted soon. Birla said this on the concluding day of the 84th All India Presiding Officers Conference in Mumbai. Birla informed that a Committee under the Chairmanship of Speaker, Maharashtra Legislative Assembly, Advocate Rahul Narwekar, will be constituted to review the Anti-Defection Law. Vice President and Chairman Rajya Sabha Jagdeep Dhankar delivered Valedictory Address. Governor of Maharashtra Ramesh Bais, Deputy Chairman, Rajya Sabha Hariwansh; Speaker of Maharashtra Legislative Assembly Rahul Narwekar; and Deputy Chief Minister, Maharashtra Devendra Fadnis graced the Valedictory Session and addressed the distinguished dignitaries. 26 Presiding Officers from 18 States, including 16 Speakers attended the Conference. In his address Dhankar recalled the spectacular Republic Day celebrations on Kartavya Path that revealed our exponential, phenomenal and all around growth, cutting edge of country's woman power emerging as a unique feature besides the technological prowess, depth of Indian culture and upbeat mood of the nation. "Disruption in legislatures is cancerous not only for legislatures but also for democracy and society. Curbing it is not optional but absolute necessity to save sanctity of legislature. No time is left we are perhaps cliffhanging and we need to awaken ourselves. It is alarmingly worrisome that disruption and disturbance in Legislatures- temples of



democracy, have assumed monstrous dimensions posing existential challenge to these institutions," the Chairman Rajya Sabha said. Dhankar said it is high time for Presiding Officers to invoke their authority to ensure discipline and decorum as lack of these is virtually shaking the very foundations of Legislatures. Referring to the observations of Prime Minister Narendra Modi regarding making legislatures paperless in his video address on inaugural day, Birla informed that Lok Sabha has achieved remarkable success in this direction through Digital Parliament. Mentioning about challenges posed by new technologies in the functioning of Legislatures, Birla spoke about telecast and broadcast of proceedings expunged by the Chair and observed that an action plan is required in this direction. Birla opined that media, including social media, should report authentic records of parliamentary proceedings. On the day five resolutions were adopted which were urge Parliament and State/UT Legislatures to review and align Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in accordance with the letter and spirit of our Constitution; encourage Parliament/State/UT Legislatures to take effective steps at capacity-building of

grassroot Panchayati Raj institutions and Urban Local Bodies to further help strengthening the vibrant and ancient democratic ethos of our country; recommended legislative bodies to adopt and promote emerging technologies including Artificial Intelligence (AI), for improving efficiency, transparency, productivity and engagement with citizens; recognising the important role of Legislative Committees and to resolve that AIPOC will take pro-active measures to implement "One Nation One Legislative Platform" for resource and experience sharing between legislatures and closer public engagement with the citizens. On the occasion Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman Hariwansh said dissent in some form has always been part of the democratic set up, however, that must be within limits and adhere to the rules and procedures of the House. "These days, disruptions start from the first few days of the session and continue for several days indicating that these disruptions are often planned and meant to interrupt the primary job of the legislature," said Hariwansh. Hariwansh urged to ensure better party coordination and consensus in smooth functioning of legislatures.

Railways completes employment process for 1.5 lakh new posts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India's national transporter, Indian Railway, which is also the largest employer has recently completed the employment process for 1.5 lakh posts in various capacities including to address the prime concerns of safety and security of the passengers as well as property of the railways. Sources in the Ministry of Railways said that the railways' recruitment arm-Railway Recruitment Board - has started with new process to bring out vacancies on a regular basis, practically every year because infrastructure and operations are increasing every year besides to counter the allegations on the BJP government in failing the employment expectations within then job seekers. "Vacancies in multiple categories will be filled on a yearly basis. The recruitment of



5696 ALP (Loco pilots) has started. It is to be noted that the vacancies in ALP category are 3190. It means more number of recruitment process has been started than the ALPs vacancies. It is a regular process and recruitment being done as per the vacancies arise," said a senior railway official. IR is increasing its infrastructure and operations day by day. The vacancy assessment is done for every six months or sometimes less than that period also. "We have recently completed the employment process for 1,50,000 new employees and immediately after concluding that, we started the new process of selection of ALPs. There will be more employment opportunities in technical and non-technical popular categories and also in Group D. To ensure more opportunities for everyone, this will be an annual process," said Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav.

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Pariksha Pe Charcha good medium to discuss education, exams: Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A day ahead of his annual Pariksha Pe Charcha interaction with the students, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said it has become a good medium to discuss issues related to education and examinations. In his monthly 'Mann Ki Baat' broadcast, Modi said over 2.25 crore students have registered for the programme this year, noting that the corresponding number was merely 22,000 in 2018 when it



was organised for the first time. The prime minister said this is one programme which he always looked forward to as it gives him an opportunity to interact with the students and he also tries to mitigate their exam related stress. "Many innovative efforts have also been undertaken to inspire the students and spread awareness about exam related stress. I urge all of you, especially the youth and students, to join in record numbers tomorrow. I too would love to talk to you," he said.

Shah to launch project for agri, rural banks computerisation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Home and Cooperation Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday will launch the Rs 225 crore-project envisaging computerisation of offices of the Agriculture and Rural Development Banks (ARDBs) and the State Registrar of Cooperative Societies (RCSs) across the country at an event here. This initiative, part of a broader digitalization effort, targets 1851 units of ARDBs in 13 States/UTs aims enhancing efficiency, promoting transparency, and ensuring uniformity in operations, ultimately enabling quick access to services and saving time for both administrators and the public.



The implementation involves linking these units with NABARD through a national unified software, marking a significant step in modernizing the country's cooperative banking sector. "Furthermore, the initiative aims at reducing transaction costs, facilitating loan distribu-

tion to farmers, and enabling real-time data access for better monitoring and assessment of schemes. "This will benefit small and marginal farmers, connected with ARDBs for credit and related services through Primary Agriculture Credit Societies (PACSs) at the grass-

roots level," said an official from the Ministry. During the event being jointly organized by the Ministry and national cooperative lender National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC), the Minister will also launch computerization of offices of the RCS in all States and Union Territories, motivating them for e-functioning and implement an IT-oriented workflow by the Cooperative Acts and Regulations of the States and Union Territories. Along with this, its targets also include better efficiency, accountability, and transparency in RCS offices, setting up analytics, and ensuring linkage with the national database. The Primary Agriculture Credit Societies (PACSs) are



also being enabled to start digital services by taking them on board as Common Service Centers (CSCs). So far more than 50,000 PACSs have been onboarded as CSCs and over 30,000 have already started providing services. In addition to this, the Ministry has set up a new National Cooperative Database containing data from more than 8 lakh cooperative societies, and this database will be launched soon and made available to all stakeholders. This initiative is in line with the Government's comprehensive strategy to modernize the cooperative sector and enhance efficiency by bringing the entire cooperative ecosystem on a digital platform, the official added.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Stree shakti

The rise and rise of women power in India across sectors calls for celebrating women and womanhood

In recent years, India has witnessed a remarkable and inspiring phenomenon — the meteoric rise of women across varied fields. From business, medicine, politics and education to science and technology, Indian women are breaking barriers, shattering stereotypes and taking giant strides in traditionally male-dominated fields. This surge of empowerment is aptly celebrated as 'Stree Shakti', highlighting the strength, resilience and capability of the nation's female force. One of the most noticeable trends in recent times is the increasing presence of women in leadership roles and entrepreneurship. Women-led businesses are flourishing, contributing not only to the nation's economic growth but also challenging the conventional gender roles. From tech startups to traditional enterprises, women entrepreneurs are carving a niche, proving that gender is not a hindrance to success. In the fields of science and technology, women are making groundbreaking contributions, redefining the landscape of innovation. India has seen a rise in the number of women scientists, engineers and innovators who are actively involved in cutting-edge research and technological advancements. Their achievements not only propel India's progress in these domains but also inspire the next generation of women to pursue careers in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics).

It is indeed a matter of pride that many women contributed to the successful Chandrayaan-3, which speaks volumes about their determination. Moreover, the healthcare sector in India has been witnessing a significant transformation, thanks to the rise of women in medicine. Women doctors, researchers and healthcare professionals are at the forefront of medical breakthroughs and advancements. Their contributions extend beyond traditional healthcare roles, influencing healthcare policies, research and the overall well-being of society. In the realm of education, women are excelling as educators, administrators and researchers. Female scholars are contributing to diverse fields of study, bringing fresh perspectives and insights to academia. While celebrating the rise of 'Stree Shakti', it's essential to acknowledge the challenges that women continue to face in their professional journeys. Gender bias, stereotypes and systemic hurdles persist, but the resilience and determination of women in India are breaking down these barriers. Organisations, both public and private, are recognising the importance of gender diversity and actively working towards creating more inclusive work environments. The Prime Minister's clarion call for 'Beti Bachao, Beti Pado' is indeed a laudable step but the real challenge is to change people's mindset. Rising women power in India is not only about today's achievements but also about paving the way for future generations. The celebration of 'Stree Shakti' is a celebration of diversity, equality and the collective strength of a nation on the path of progress.

PICTALK



Artists who participated in the 75th Republic Day parade perform at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, in Delhi

PTI

Virtual reality and AI will transform real estate market

Artificial Intelligence and data analytics are empowering real estate professionals with actionable insights and predictive analytics

The integration of technology into the real estate sector is ushering in a new era of innovation and efficiency. As digital transformation accelerates, emerging technologies are poised to reshape the property landscape, offering unprecedented opportunities for stakeholders across the industry. Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) technologies are revolutionising the property viewing experience. By offering immersive virtual tours and interactive floor plans, these technologies enable prospective buyers and tenants to explore properties remotely, thereby expanding market reach and enhancing customer engagement. In 2024, VR and AR applications will become increasingly sophisticated, offering personalised experiences.

Blockchain and Smart Contracts: Blockchain technology and smart contracts are transforming property transactions by enhancing security, transparency, and efficiency. By creating immutable digital records and automating contract execution, these technologies



mitigate fraud risks and streamline the conveyancing process. In the coming years, the adoption of blockchain and smart contracts will become more widespread, enabling seamless, secure, and cost-effective real estate transactions.

AI and Data Analytics: Artificial Intelligence (AI) and data analytics are empowering real estate professionals with actionable insights and predictive analytics. By analyzing market trends, identifying investment opportunities, and optimizing property management processes, AI-driven solutions are enhancing decision-making capabilities and driving operational excellence. As AI algorithms become more advanced and data analytics tools more sophisticated, the integration of these technologies will continue to

redefine the real estate industry's competitive landscape. In conclusion, the fusion of technology and real estate in 2024 is not merely a trend but a seismic shift that promises to redefine the very essence of property transactions and experiences. This transformative journey unfolds across multiple dimensions, each offering a unique blend of innovation, efficiency, and opportunity. At the forefront, Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) are revolutionizing property exploration, transcending the limitations of physical distance and enabling prospective buyers and tenants to embark on immersive journeys through properties from the comfort of their homes. The evolution of these technologies in 2024 is set to introduce personalized experiences that resonate with individual preferences, thereby amplifying market reach and fostering deeper connections between properties and potential occupants. Paralleling the emergence of Blockchain technology and smart contracts is ushering in an era of unprecedented security, transparency,

and efficiency in property transactions. These innovations are not only mitigating fraud risks but also reimagining the conveyancing process, paving the way for seamless, secure, and cost-effective transactions that resonate with the demands of the modern era. Furthermore, the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and data analytics is empowering real estate professionals with a treasure trove of actionable insights and predictive capabilities. These advancements are not only enhancing operational excellence but also shaping a future where data-driven strategies and insights drive growth, innovation, and success. Beyond the technological innovations, the real essence lies in the transformative impact these advancements are poised to create. In essence, as we venture further into 2024 and beyond, the confluence of technology and real estate is paving the way for a new era characterised by innovation, efficiency, and opportunity. (The writer is an industry expert; views expressed are personal)



SANJEEV SRIVASTVA

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Charting a path for Hindu-Muslim unity

The historic consecration of Ram temple in Ayodhya signifies not just a momentous event but a call for reconciliation

Every battle must end, so must every dispute. Killings are more easily forgotten than the destruction of buildings. But when a residence of the divine is destroyed, it is unforgettable. For a Hindu, a mandir is a residence of God. The reason is that an elevated human soul either meets the divine or obtains a glimpse of Him as Ramakrishna Paramahansa did. This is very different from a synagogue, church or mosque, all of which are merely prayer halls. Their respective faiths and adherents do not consider them to be residences of the divine.

January 22, 2024 is now behind us. It has been an epoch-making day, led by the man who made it possible. The Prime Minister's consecration of Shri Ram Lalla at Ayodhya marked the return of Lord Rama to his abode on earth after 500 years of not only waiting, but ceaseless struggle and sacrifices. Ever since Mughal invader Babar's henchman Mir Baiqi destroyed the original temple at Ayodhya in 1528 AD, Hindus never gave up the struggle to reclaim the birthplace of Rama. The history of battles waged by the Hindu faithful is a long one, but December 6, 1992 was the day when the edifice known as Babri Masjid was sent to the dust. But, as our Prime Minister has said, now is perhaps the time for reconciliation.

The Somnath Temple at PrabhasPatana near Veraval (Gujarat) was destroyed by the Turkic marauder Mahmud of Ghazni in 1026 A.D. Even after a thousand years later, the devilish crime has not faded from Hindu memory. Thereafter, of course, several thousand temples have been demolished or desecrated. By European traditions and the way they have conducted their politics, the dispute over these desecrations and loss caused should have been settled before New Delhi agreed to part with the share of pre-1947 India's assets to Pakistan at the time of Partition. Unfortunately, nothing was done. Instead, more temples were destroyed even in the Kashmir Valley, where India ruled.



Three-quarters of a century have since passed. Surely, it is beyond time that the issue should be settled and a reconciliation and a reconciliation achieved, if the two communities are expected to coexist cordially in the same country. The question is: what is the gesture required to bring about such a reconciliation?

Very broadly, the desecrated temples can be divided into two categories. Until the period of the Lodi Sultanate, which began from 1451 onwards, and the spread of its rule over certain regions of northern India, Islamic invaders intruding into the country were not accompanied or followed by their architects. The pre-Lodi Muslim sultans therefore, converted temples into mosques readily by smashing the edifice along with the moortis (idols) inside the sanctum sanctorum, and replacing them with mehrabs (a niche in a mosque, which indicates the qibla, the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca) to face Mecca and a minbar (pulpit) of steps, whereupon the imam stands every Friday to deliver his khutba (Islamic sermon).

Many temples were broken down and converted into such mosques. A prominent example of such a conversion



THERE WOULD BE ABOUT 200 TO 300 SUCH CONVERTED AND RE-CONVERTIBLE EDIFICES. THEY COULD BE RETURNED TO HINDU INSTITUTIONS, WHILE THE THOUSANDS OF RECYCLED ONES COULD BE LEFT ALONE

is the Dhaj Din kaJhopra, which stands at about a furlong's distance from the popular Ajmer Sharif dargah. The odd name signifies that this particular conversion was effected within sixty hours of the desecration of the original Hindu place of worship, because ShahbuddinGhori was in a hurry to pray on his return journey via Ajmer. His slave QutbuddinAibak obediently had the conversion executed within two and a half days for his master and badshah to pray when he returned. The erstwhile temple had actually been a complex of three temples, which were promptly combined and converted into a mosque-like edifice. It is therefore, even now, in a condition to be reconverted into a temple, almost equally quickly.

There would be about 200 to 300 such converted and reconvertible edifices. They could be returned to Hindu institutions, while the thousands of recycled ones could be left alone, as a gesture for the process of reconciliation. These were the temples that were broken down almost to the plinth level and reconstructed with the debris being utilized in such reconstruction. The reconstruction using the same debris was done in Islamic style. These

are present in the country by the thousands, with 3,000 of them having been catalogued after being identified either with documentary evidence and/or epigraphs. These latter structures could be left alone with an apology for having reduced them to such a state, along with an undertaking that such criminal acts shall not be repeated. An undertaking must also be given that the restored temples handed over to Hindu institutions and bodies will be given away irrevocably, and no claim on them whatsoever shall ever be made in the future.

Other issues too, will inevitably come up. As part of the process of reconciliation, issues such as the uniform civil code—which are part of the Constitution of India, but as a Directive Principle—should be dealt with suitably. So also should the issue of the outdated and debilitating waqf, called a "dead hand" by a former chancellor A.A.A. Fyze. The intention must be to not keep pending any ongoing irritant between the two communities. Let peace and goodwill prevail.

(The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THE CYCLE OF LIFE

Sir — Birthday, a joyous bell, tolls yearly, awakening us to life's transient journey, as articulated by Kannada litterateur Rayasam Bheemasena Rao, aka 'Beechi.' Each celebration veils the inexorable march from newness to oldness, a reminder of aging. The initial birthday elates parents, but with time, the sheen fades. Aging, though golden at times, heralds the onset of the end. Birth heralds morning's welcome, while death echoes evening's farewell—a cyclical journey from vitality to fatigue in life's fleeting passage.

Demise carries inherent sadness, its intensity shaped by one's connection to the departed. The passing of those deemed anti-national or anti-social elicits little collective grief; their demise isn't labeled as such by society. While family may mourn, society often finds relief. Birth heralds joy, death, sorrow—yet in troubled families, each birth may sow discord, each death easing societal burdens. Happiness at birth prevails, sorrow in death is the norm, not the exception.

K V Seetharamaiah | Bengaluru

SHETTAAR'S 'GHAR WAPSI'

Sir — Opportunism and greed have overruled all values in politics. Days before the Karnataka assembly elections in May 2023, former Karnataka Chief Minister Jagadish Shettar had joined the Congress miffed over being denied a ticket. Unfortunately, though the party comfortably romped home, Shettar lost in his bastion. But despite the defeat, he was made a member of the state legislative council. Now, after nine months in Congress, Shettar is back in the BJP. Political circles are agog with reasons for Shettar's "ghar wapsi" but one cannot overlook the fact that he is the same person who had declared that he would never return to the BJP in his lifetime.

There is no doubt that Shettar, being a powerful member of the influential Lingayat community in Karnataka, has contributed to the rise of BJP in the state.

Dietary controversy



The move that has ignited widespread criticism, the Maharashtra government has decided to mark the food preferences of students on their identity cards, distinguishing between vegetarians and non-vegetarians. The contentious decision aims to streamline the dis-

tribution of specific food items, namely bananas for vegetarians and eggs for non-vegetarians, under the Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti scheme. The state's school education department had previously announced the inclusion of additional items in midday meals to enhance nutritional value, introducing bananas for vegetarians and eggs for non-vegetarians.

A recent department circular recommends using visible red or green dots on students' ID cards to signify their dietary preferences, causing widespread criticism from educators who deem it unnecessary. Critics argue that the classification, indicating egg consumption consent, may not consider occasional exceptions, especially in diverse cultural backgrounds. Religious sentiments, particularly concerns about offending vegetarians, further complicate the implementation. The circular's practicality is also questioned, as objections highlight potential issues with this rigid system.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

The BJP is wary of the fact that his deserting the party could have resulted in some of its candidates losing the elections in the Kittur Karnataka region. With the all-important general elections a few months away, the BJP wants to leave nothing to chance. Shettar may also have struck a deal. That being said, the party would have sent a great message to all turncoat politicians had it declined to welcome Shettar back.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

WOMEN POWER AT KARTAVYA PATH

Sir — The 75th Republic Day celebration turns more glorious with the maximum participation of Women this time in the Republic Day parade. For the first time in history, a women tri-service contingent marches down the Kartavya Path, showcasing the Women's Power of New India. The 100 women artists heralded the parade invocation with their musical band. Later Monika Lakara commended

her team. CISF contingent is also led by Kashyap Monika, Megha Nayak commended Ambika Patil commended the ITBP marching band, Jaya Sharma commended the SSB band, and so on. Watching Indian women march proudly along the Kartavya Path on the 75th Republic Day is profoundly touching. Their gallantry embodies the fulfillment of their responsibility to the nation. The delightful spirit of Nari Shakti, evident in their jubilant participation, fills every Indian with a sense of triumphant pride. This inclusive celebration signals to the world our commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment. Witnessing women leading development in a new India transforms every celebration into a true jubilation, an honor to behold.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

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FIRST COLUMN

TEACHERS ARE THE PIVOT OF EDUCATION

A satisfied teacher can contribute a lot to the well-being of pupils



SAKSHI SETHI

The culture of work ethic rests on delayed gratification, hyper-competitiveness and the perpetual need to outperform what machines can do. The outcome is often disappointment and life dissatisfaction. Living in a so-called modern-day technological world, a workplace environment today has a direct impact on job satisfaction. Of course, money, work-life balance and diversity play a crucial part, but being fulfilled and happy at your job is a hard feeling to beat. A favourable work environment can boost morale, motivation, teamwork, performance and production whilst a poor work environment can contribute to high levels of stress, anxiety and burnout. It is a well-established reality that organizations in the world today can no longer survive without focusing on their employees.

If they have to be at a competitive edge, they have to invest in their human resources and place them on top priority. Studies have even found that more than half of job seekers would reject a job offer if they found that the company to which they are looking forward had a bad workplace culture as it can negatively impact their mental and physical well-being and above all their career growth. The Indian Education System for instance is facing a continuing concern in terms of recruiting and retaining its quality teachers.

It is widely acknowledged that teachers have a pivotal role in the development of an inclusive education system for it is believed that the teacher is the most vital single factor of influence in the system of education. Colleges and universities are becoming increasingly accountable for teaching outcomes to meet rigorous accreditation standards. It is the teacher who matters most as far as the quality of education is concerned. A well-adjusted and satisfied teacher can contribute a lot to the well-being of his/her pupils. It is in the interests of educational institutions and the systems to ensure that levels of job satisfaction are held high so that the main focus of educational institutions, is not hindered. Job satisfaction in any field of work depends a lot on how conducive the work environment is.



Poor working conditions, low levels of pay, no scope for career advancements and lack of recognition will definitely result in increased rates of absenteeism, poor productivity, frustration and even high turnover rates resulting in a decline in target achievement and finally its closure. Employee turnover affects the productivity of the company.

An employee may serve in an organization for a long time provided that he/she is contented with his/her work. The behavior of an employee also depends on their satisfaction. When a worker is satisfied and contented, he tends to behave well for it has been often said, "A Happy Employee Is a Productive Employee." Remember, job satisfaction is like a high-wire balancing act, with multiple factors constantly in play. There is nothing more discouraging in the workplace than being insecure about the job.

Human resources are the most important resources in any organisation and in order to ensure that an organisation can compete with other firms, retaining efficient and experienced employees is the first and foremost step.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

Historical factors at play in Israel-Palestine conflict



SUKHDEV SINGH

This conflict finds its roots in history that spans over a century when the Zionist movement, advocating for the establishment of a Jewish homeland, gained momentum

The past 114 day-long Israel-Palestine war has an immediate as well as a long historical context: the immediate context of the war is the Hamas attack killing 1200 and taking 120 Israeli civilians as hostages on October 7 last year; while its long history begins with the proposal to establish the Jewish homeland, Israel, in this region after their dispersion from European countries. During the first world-war, the proposal gets impetus and the 'conflict' becomes intense with the British promising Jews to help them set up the Jewish homeland in Palestine after the collapse of Ottoman Empire for their influence on the US to support the post-war policies of the Britain. The conception and claim of homeland by the Jews dispersed from Europe on the same swathes of land where a mix of Muslim, Jew, and Christian population is already in place holding their identity as Arabs or Palestinians generates a 'conflict' of Jewish-Israeli nationalism pitted against the Palestinian-Arabic nationalism. The 'conflict' gains intensity at the revelation of the three self-contradictory agreements made by the British authorities during this time for their own imperialist interests treating the region as 'terra nullius' or 'booty of the war': these agreements are famous as the 'Hussain-McMahon Correspondence' (1915-1916), the 'Sykes-Picot Agreement' (1916) and the 'Balfour Declaration' (1917).

The 'Hussain-McMahon Correspondence' promised Arabs the independence of Palestine in exchange for their support for the British against the Ottoman (Uthman) Empire in the First World War, yet, on the other hand, in contradiction the 'Balfour Declaration', promised the Jews their 'homeland' in the Palestine. But after the war, using 'Sykes-Picot Agreement' between the British and the French, the British took Palestine region under their 'Authority' securing a safe access to India through the Suez Canal and the Persian Gulf but deepening the conflict between Israel and Palestine. The Palestine region remained under the British Authority until 1948 and between 1917- 1948, emigration of Jews in Palestine and the Israel-Palestine conflict swelled in parallel. In 1930, the Arabs launched a revolt against the British colonial rule in Palestine and its policy of Jewish resettlement here, which resulted in a plan to partition Palestine into the Jewish and Arab states leaving Jerusalem under international administration. The Jewish leaders accepted but the Arab states and the Palestinians rejected the proposal.

On the other hand, during the Second World War, the Jewish Holocaust campaign in Germany and some other European countries left the Jews homeless. In August 1945, by the American President, Truman's appeal to the British Prime Minister, Attlee, to settle 100,000 Nazi Holocaust victims in Palestine, America also joined the powers that would determine the future of Palestine, though neither America nor Britain offered them refuge in America or Britain. The Arabs sympathized with the displaced Jews, but opposed the creation of Israel on the Palestinian territories. America and Britain continued to orient their policy on Palestine to their convenience. Tired of the Second World War and directly dealing with the civil war in



DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR, THE JEWISH HOLOCAUST CAMPAIGN IN GERMANY AND SOME OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES LEFT THE JEWS HOMELESS

Palestine, the British government ended its Authority over Palestine at midnight on 14 May, 1948 leaving the Jewish-Arab factions fighting each other during the civil war. On the same day the Jewish leadership in Palestine announced the establishment of the State of Israel. The birth of Israel from a violent war caused the displacement of approximately 700,000 Palestinian-Arabs. It is called by the Jews the 'War of Independence' but by the Palestinians as the 'Nakba' meaning 'destruction and desolation'. Since then Palestine has been a land of 'conflicts', 'battles' and third party 'peace agreements'. The current 'Israel-Palestinian war' building on more than 100 years of conflict and internecine battles for their 'homelands' in the same geographical territories is guided by the right-wing nationalism on both sides, with the external third party players consistently present to fulfil their (neo)colonial interests. In the 2023-24 Israel-Palestine war, Israel and Hamas or Palestine are the parties directly in conflict, and much of the discussion about the war is usually focused on 'who of the immediate players in the war is more culpable' and 'who of the two has a stronger claim for its 'homeland' in the same region, while the role of third parties in the war remains elusive. One breed of third party players is of those coerced into war and circumscribed by their regional geographical, cultural and historical existence; they are affected by what happens in the region. But there is another breed of third

party extra-regional powers in the war whose presence is guided by their geo-political and economic interests; they act as catalysts to turn the 'conflict' into a 'war' and choose between 'right' and 'left' to their convenience. To understand the multifaceted politics of the Israeli-Palestinian war, it is also important to describe the role of these catalyst forces at work behind the war. By vetoing the UN proposal for 'immediate ceasefire' America and Britain have helped the war to inflame and by sanctioning the sale of weapons and ammunition twice, America has fuelled the war and encouraged the right-wing Israeli government passion for displacement of Palestinian population. In the name of eliminating Hamas and their bases, the indiscriminate heavy bombardment by Israel, with the unflinching support and encouragement by the US, has led to the mass destruction of ordinary Palestinian civilians. Israel's current war against Hamas is in reality a war against Palestinians. The Israel-Palestine war of 2023-24 is the worst not only because the majority of the dead are civilians but also because it is being fought like a genocide. The right-wing Israeli government, led by Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, wants complete Israeli control in Palestine and does not recognize any role for the Palestinian Authority. Two Israeli ministers of the Israeli government have revealed their ideology by their advice to the Palestinians to leave for the country that permits them.

The American support has reinforced such an ideology. Facing challenges from within and without, pressure from the countries of West Asia and fear of Israel becoming more intransigent, America has reviewed its policy in Palestine. The US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has met with the leaders of Turkey, Qatar and Jordan on his fourth diplomatic tour of West Asia to drum up support for the US post-war plan of 'two states' and reconstruction of Gaza. In a press conference he has said that the Palestinians should not be pressured to leave Gaza.

But the US State Department spokesman Matthew Miller's comments on a lawsuit in the International Court of Justice by South Africa against Israel for committing 'genocide' contradict its 'peace proposal' and exposes its position on displacement. On the one hand, America's support for a 'two-state solution' and criticism of Israel's claim for Jewish state on the whole region, but on the other hand, billions of dollars annual US aid to Israel for years and sale of arms during the war and veto of UN proposal for 'immediate ceasefire' exposes its ambivalent policy on Gaza and cleverness as of Britain during the First World War. After all, Israel is using the US aid and weapons to occupy Palestinian territories and disperse the Palestinian population.

(The writer is retired professor Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar and member, Governing Council, INTECH; views are personal)

Unsung heroes in Padma awards list to boost heritage preservation

Among the latest Padma Shri awardees, 34 were ordinary citizens, including tribals and those working for tribal welfare

The Padma Awards, the prestigious civilian honours in India, are announced annually on the eve of Republic Day. These awards aim to acknowledge achievements across various fields where a component of public service is evident. The history of the Padma Awards dates back to 1954 when the Government of India established two civilian awards—Bharat Ratna and Padma Vibhushan. The latter initially had three classes: Pahela Varg, Dusra Varg, and Tisra Varg. They were later renamed Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan, and Padma Shri through a Presidential Notification issued on January 8, 1955. Even though the Padma award has been bestowed on various



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

celebrated people since 1954, it was only from 2014 onwards that it started focusing on the common man. Till then, it was a distant dream for a commoner to aim for the award. Even when we recognise a scientist working in the lab for their note-worthy contributions, we often forget the thousands of real 'scientists' who work on the field utilising the knowledge they gathered through the ages from their forefathers. There are great farmers who are developing new plant varieties

and cultivation packages. There are great tribal healers who can cure diseases even without the least knowledge of modern science. There are great conservation biologists who know how to conserve nature without any understanding of ecology. There are excellent climatologists who can predict weather simply by looking at the changes happening in nature. There are exemplary people working in astronomy, metallurgy, engineering and other fields. These people work selflessly for the benefit of society without realising even the significance of their work for society. Behind every architectural marvelance or artistic work, there is the craftsmanship of our skilled labour force. Unfortunately, people recog-



nise only the finished product, not the hand that made it happen. There are thousands of such people who live amongst us without seeking any attention. They may not hold a PhD degree or a professional degree, but their knowledge and scientific skills are more than those of a trained scientist.

In the recent list of 110 Padma Shri awardees, it was announced that 34 were such ordinary people, of whom more than one-third are tribals or those who have worked for tribal welfare. The prominent unsung heroes include Parbati Baruah, fondly known as "Hathi ki Pari," a female elephant trainer from Goalparahas, Assam. Defying

deep-rooted stereotypes, Baruah has devoted four decades to addressing human-elephant conflicts. Her scientific methodology has supported three state governments in effectively managing and capturing troublesome tuskers, illustrating the effectiveness of challenging conventional norms. The farming community is doing yeoman service for the nation and humanity. It's appreciable that many farmers found a place on this year's Padma list. Sathyanarayana Beleri, the rice farmer from Kasaragod, conserves 650 traditional rice varieties on his farm without any sophisticated infrastructure, which even ICAR institutions don't do. Other farmers who were recognised include Sarbeswar

Basumatary, the tribal farmer from Chirang, Assam; K Chellammal, an Organic farmer from Andaman; Yanung Jamoh Lego from Arunachal Pradesh and Sanjay Anant Patil of Goa. Many people who work in nature conservation, folk arts and craftsmanship have also been recognised. The knowledge these exceptional people garnered was passed down through generations orally and is not documented properly. The knowledge is shared only among the close family members. In most cases, the second generation shifts away from the traditional workforce, moving toward more lucrative urban jobs. In the long run, if there are no takers for this traditional knowledge, it will become

extinct, as happened to the Indian Knowledge system. Modi government's initiative to recognise such people is a futuristic vision to preserve the remnants of still-prevailing Indian knowledge. This will revive interest in their community to carry forward the great work their forefathers have been doing. Recognition through a coveted award like Padma Shri will also provide them respect from other members of the society. The government has fostered a sense of self-confidence and admiration for one's work by making the Padma award accessible to the common man.

(The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore, views are personal)

India gas demand to rise 6 per cent in 2024: IEA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's natural gas demand is expected to rise by 6 per cent in 2024 with a rise in consumption in fertiliser units, power generation and industrial sectors, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA). Following the 7 per cent year-on-year decline observed in 2022, India's primary gas supply rose by 5 per cent in 2023, with growth primarily driven by the petrochemical, power generation, refinery and industrial sectors.

development of its national pipeline grid and city gas infrastructure," IEA said. Gas Market Report released last week. India's natural gas demand had risen to 64 billion cubic meters in 2023. Liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports rose by 7 per cent on the year to 29 billion cubic meters last year, with import dependency at 44 per cent of the nation's natural gas consumption. Domestic production was up 6 per cent on the year to 35 billion cubic meters on the back of a rise in output from Reliance Industries' KG-D6 block. "We expect India to increase its LNG imports in 2024 by 7 per cent, fuelled by demand from the power and fertiliser sectors, as the country plans to stop importing urea by 2025," IEA said.



Natural gas extracted from below surface and seabeds is used to make fertiliser, generate electricity, convert into CNG to run automobiles, piped to households for cooking purposes and used as fuel and feedstock in industries. India's domestic production is insufficient to meet demand and so the fuel is imported as LNG in cryogenic ships.

Power companies imported 2.32 billion cubic meters of LNG in 2023, making up around 9 per cent of total imports and up by 76 per cent on the year. In November 2023 India approved mandatory blending of compressed biogas into the domestic gas supply. The mandate will be set at 1 per cent of total compressed natural gas and domestic piped natural gas consumption from 2025, and raised gradually to 5 per cent from 2028-29. On reforms, IEA said, "India continued to advance gas market reforms in 2023. The country introduced a unified pipeline tariff system on April 1, which could benefit consumers located far from domestic gas supply sources and/or LNG terminals. In addition to the market reforms, India is considering

establishing strategic gas reserves to enhance gas supply security". The Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) introduced the Unified Tariff (UFT) policy in April 2023 to create a single, consistent and fair tariff structure for natural gas transport across the country. The UFT policy will apply to a network of 21 pipelines, representing around 90 per cent of pipelines in operation or under construction. The price of transporting gas consists of two components - a fixed unified tariff based on the levelised cost of service of the entire pipeline network, and a variable zonal factor depending on distance. "The UFT policy aims to create a more stable, competitive and transparent pricing regime, which should benefit both gas supply and demand."



Auto firms seek continued push to green mobility, infra development

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Government needs to continue with favourable policies to promote green mobility while also focussing on infrastructure development at a robust pace in the upcoming Budget, according to some leading firms in the automobile space. The Union government is all set to present the interim Budget on February 1. "We expect capex on infrastructural projects to continue, aiding the automotive sector. The policy push for green mobility should remain a key focus for the government, encouraging faster adoption of electric vehicles," Mercedes-Benz India MD and CEO Santosh Iyer said.

The luxury car industry has a significant value contribution to the GDP and the segment aspires for a rationalised duty structure and GST on priority, he added. "Overall, we expect consistency in various policies and no surprises in the upcoming budget," Iyer stated.

Luxury vehicles currently attract the top GST slab of 28 per cent with an additional cess of 20 per cent on sedans and 22 per cent on SUVs, taking the total tax incidence to up to 50 per cent. Toyota Kirloskar Motor Deputy Managing Director (Corporate Planning, Finance & Administration and Manufacturing) Swapnesh R Maru said the automaker remains confident that the Government will continue its push towards shifting the economy and transportation sector to a greener future that is less dependent on fossil fuels. "Looking ahead, policy stability and continued emphasis on spurring investment and infrastructure development will not only further enhance the country's global competitiveness but also lead to growth of the manufacturing and service sector," he added.

JK Tyre & Industries Chairman & Managing Director Raghupati Singhania said that consistent automotive policies would propel sectoral expansion.

"A robust budget is vital for India's journey to become the third-largest global economy," he noted. Mahindra Last Mile Mobility MD & CEO Suman Mishra said that by driving inclusive income generation, electric three-wheelers and commercial vehicles pave the way for financial upliftment of many.

"We call upon the Union Budget 2024 to prioritise this segment through continued FAME support, fostering economic empowerment for the most deserving and environmental well-being for all," she noted.



No disruption in oil flows to India, only freight up due to Red Sea crisis: HPCL

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The ongoing attacks on shipping vessels by Houthi militants in the Red Sea have not impacted the flow of crude oil to India but freight has gone up due to rerouting via the Cape of Good Hope, Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) chairman Pushp Kumar Joshi said. India, the world's third-biggest oil importer, gets a bulk of its Russian supplies through the Red Sea. Russian supplies made up for over 35 per cent of India's total crude imports in 2023, amounting to 1.7 million barrels per day. Russian ships and cargoes are not being prime targets of the attacks at this stage however rerouting of ships around the southern tip of Africa instead of transiting through the Suez Canal and Red Sea has led to ships taking longer voyages, resulting in the shortage of

ships and rise in freight charges. In a post-third quarter earnings call with investors, Joshi said HPCL has tied up crude oil supplies till mid-April and it does not see any supply disruptions. HPCL meets 44-45 per cent of its crude oil needs on term contracts with national oil companies such as those in Saudi Arabia and Iraq. The remaining is on the spot or from the current market, he said. "Term crude has not been impacted (due to the Red Sea crisis)," he said, adding the spot imports are on DES basis where the shipping is arranged by the supplier. "The spot supplies do not get impacted." HPCL, he said, has "already tied up crude requirements till fiscal year end (in March) and the first couple of weeks of April." "Crude oil supplies have not seen any disruption as of now."

FPIs take out ₹24,700 crore from equities

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) have dumped Indian equities worth Rs 24,700 crore so far this month, owing to surging bond yield in the US. On the other hand, they are bullish on the debt market and infused Rs 17,120 crore in the debt market during the period under review, data with the depositories showed. According to the data, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) have pulled out Rs 24,734 crore from Indian equities this month (till January 25). Before this, FPIs made a net investment of Rs 66,134 crore in the entire December and Rs 9,000

crore in November. "The rising bond yields in the US is a matter of concern, and this has triggered the recent bout of selling in the cash market," V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services, said. "The rally in global stock markets was triggered by the Fed pivot which saw the 10-year bond yield falling from 5 per cent to around 3.8 per cent. "Now the 10-year bond is back at 4.18 per cent, which indicates that the Fed rate cut will come only in H2 of 2024," he added. FPIs started the new year with a cautious approach opting to book profits in the Indian equity markets as



they touched all-time high levels. Moreover, uncertainty over the interest rate scenario also prompted them to stay on the sidelines and wait for further cues, before taking investment decisions with respect to investing in

emerging markets like India, Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director-Manager Research at Morningstar Investment Research India, said. On a bullish stance in the debt markets, experts said that the announcement by JP Morgan Chase & Co. in September last year that it will add Indian government bonds to its benchmark emerging market index from June 2024 influenced the inflow in the country's bond markets in the past few months. FPIs made a net investment of Rs 18,302 crore in the debt market in December, Rs 14,860 crore in November, and Rs 6,381 crore in October, data showed.

In terms of sector, FPIs were sellers in auto & auto ancillary, media & entertainment and marginally in IT, and they bought in oil and gas, power and selectively in financial services, Geojit's Vijayakumar said. Overall, the total FPI flows for 2023 stood at Rs 1.71 lakh crore in equities and Rs 68,663 crore in the debt market. Together, they infused Rs 2.4 lakh crore into the capital market. The flow in Indian equities came following a worst net outflow of Rs 1.21 lakh crore in 2022 on aggressive rate hikes by the central banks globally. Before the outflow, FPIs invested money in the last three years.

Binny Bansal quits Flipkart board

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

E-commerce major Flipkart co-founder Binny Bansal has resigned from the company's board, according to a company statement. The development comes after around six months of Bansal selling an entire stake in the company. "I am proud of the Flipkart Group's achievements over the past 16 years. Flipkart is in a robust position, with a strong leadership team and a clear path forward, and with this confidence, I have

decided to step aside, knowing the company is in capable hands. I wish the team the best as they continue to transform experiences for customers, and I remain a strong supporter of the business," Bansal said. He co-founded the e-commerce firm with Sachin Bansal in 2007. Sachin Bansal stepped down from the Flipkart board in 2018 after Walmart acquired a 77 per cent stake in the company at a valuation of USD 21 billion.



Besides being an active angel investor, Binny Bansal has also started his own firm to provide marketing support to

sellers on e-commerce platforms. "His insights and deep expertise in the business have been invaluable to the Board and company. Flipkart is the outcome of a great idea and a lot of hard work, built by teams committed to transforming how India shops. We wish Binny the best as he embarks on his next venture and thank him for the deep impact he has enabled for the Indian retail ecosystem," Flipkart CEO and board member Kalyan

Krishnamurthy said. The valuation of Flipkart has increased to around USD 38 billion. The firm, however, still continues to run in losses. The company posted a 9.4 per cent increase in consolidated net total income to Rs 56,012.8 crore in financial year 2023 against Rs 51,176 crore in FY 2022. Despite a rise in the total income, Flipkart's consolidated loss widened to Rs 4,890.6 crore in FY23 from Rs 3,371.2 crore a year ago.

431 infra projects show cost overrun of ₹4.82L crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

As many as 431 infrastructure projects, each entailing an investment of Rs 150 crore or more, were hit by cost overrun of more than Rs 4.82 lakh crore in December 2023, an official report stated.

According to the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), which monitors infrastructure projects worth Rs 150 crore and above, out of 1,820 projects, 431 reported cost overrun and 848 projects were delayed.

"Total original cost of implementation of the 1,820 projects was Rs 25,87,066.08 crore and their anticipated completion cost is likely to be Rs 30,69,595.88 crore, which reflects overall cost overruns of Rs 4,82,529.80 crore (18.65 per cent of original cost)," the ministry's latest report for December 2023 said. According to the report, the expenditure incurred on these projects till December 2023 is Rs 16,26,813.80 crore, which is 53 per cent of the anticipated cost of the projects.

However, it stated that the number of delayed projects decreased to 638, if delay is calculated on the basis of the latest schedule of completion. Out of the 848 delayed projects, 202 have overall delays in the range of 1-12 months, 200 have been delayed for 13-24 months, 323 projects for 25-60 months, and 123 projects have been delayed for more than 60 months.

CNH plans to invest up to USD 50 million in India

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Italian-American off-road construction and agriculture firm CNH is planning to invest up to USD 50 million in the farm machinery segment in India this year and launch a 105HP tractor in May, according to a top CNH India official. CNH, which produces and sells farm machinery and equipment under the New Holland brand, will focus on the compact range of tractors of below 30-40 horsepower (HP), besides targeting to sell 1,000 baler machines (used for managing stubble) this

year. Currently, CNH India has a four per cent market share in the tractor business in India and has a considerable presence in the 45-50 HP range of tractors. Speaking to PTI, CNH India and SAARC Country Manager and Managing Director Narinder Mittal said there is a huge potential in India's agriculture sector, and the company intends to double its market share to 8 per cent in the next four years. "We plan to invest about USD 40-50 million in the current



calendar year in the agriculture segment, including the programme investment," he added. Out of which, USD 25-30

million will be invested in the tractor business alone, he noted. Under the programme investment, Mittal said the

company is working on a specific tractor model of above 45 HP with a new engine for higher fuel efficiency. The cash flow for this will begin this year and the new model is likely to be launched by the end of 2025, he added. On a product launch, Mittal said a bigger tractor of 105 HP is lined up for the launch in May this year. This tractor is used for bailing and ridge application. At present, the company is importing bigger tractors of more than 100 HP to meet the growing demand for baler

and ridge machines in the country, he said. Stating that balers help in managing stubble, Mittal said there is a growing awareness about the use of such machines in the country, and consequently, the company's sales of balers have gone up significantly in 2023. CNH India sold about 840 small square balers in 2023 against 450 in the previous year. The company also sold 50 big and round balers in 2023, the company official said. "We expect that we should be touching 1,000 balers this year," he said,

adding the company is selling balers in Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and parts of Madhya Pradesh. Balers compress agricultural residue into manageable and transportable bales. Small square balers that cost around Rs 11-12 lakh per unit can be used with existing tractors, while the big/round balers that cost around Rs 2 crore per set require above 100HP tractors for operation. The company manufactures small balers in Pune but imports some components that it intends to localise by the middle of this year.

Rana Talwar, first Indian to head a global bank, dies

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Veteran banker Rana Talwar, who was the first Indian to head a global bank -- Standard Chartered Plc, died at the age of 76 years. Talwar, son-in-law of DLF Group chairman emeritus K P Singh, breathed his last on Saturday, sources said. He is survived by his wife Renuka and son Rahul. Besides DLF, he served on the boards of various companies including Asahi India Glass Limited and Great Eastern Energy Corporation Limited. The company regrets to inform about the sad demise of Talwar, a non-executive director, on Saturday, January 27, 2024, which was intimated to the company by the family members, DLF said in a regulatory filing. Born in 1948, Talwar started his career as a banker in India with Citi Bank after passing

out of the prestigious St Stephens College, Delhi. During his stint at Citi Bank, Gurvirendra Singh Talwar also known as Rana Talwar, was responsible for building the US-based bank's retail businesses across Asia Pacific and the Middle East. He was subsequently responsible for all of Citibank's retail businesses across Europe and the United States. He was a member of the Citibank/Citigroup Policy and Operating Committees. Talwar left Citibank in 1996 to join Standard Chartered Plc as Global Chief Executive. He was the first Asian to become the Chief Executive of an FTSE 25 company and of a major global bank. He was responsible for repositioning Standard Chartered Plc as a leading emerging markets bank, including the acquisition of Grindlays Bank from ANZ Bank.

Average flat size expands 11 per cent in top 7 cities

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Builders are constructing bigger homes to meet consumers' demand as the average size of flats rose 11 per cent last year across seven major cities, according to Anarock. Real estate consultant Anarock has analysed the fresh supply of housing units during 2023 across the primary residential market of seven major cities. The data showed that average flat sizes in the top 7 cities rose to 1,300 square feet last year from 1,175 square feet in 2022. In the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) and Kolkata, the average size of apartments fell, but it grew in Delhi-NCR, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Pune and Chennai in 2023. The average size stood at 1,050 square feet in 2019, 1,167 sq ft in 2020, and 1,170 sq ft in 2021.



"Northbound housing prices in the top cities have in no way dispelled the demand for generous living spaces," Anarock Chairman Anuj Puri said. The supply of bigger luxury homes increased significantly last year, he

said, adding that around 23 per cent of the total new launches were in the luxury category. "The demand for bigger-size homes was kick-started by the pandemic, but there are no signs of it waning three years later. Led by an

enduring 'new normal' in homebuyer preferences, this demand seems eminently sustainable," Puri said. Krisumi Corporation MD Mohit Jain said the aspirational segment of society is playing a pivotal role in propelling the demand for premium homes, which are spacious and bigger in size. "This trend may continue in the foreseeable future," he added. Among seven major cities, Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) and Kolkata were the only two cities where the average flat sizes decreased in 2023. In MMR, the average flat size fell 5 per cent to 794 sq ft in 2023 from 840 square feet in 2022. In Kolkata, the average flat size saw a 2 per cent decline to 1,124 sq ft last year from 1,150 square feet in 2022. Delhi-NCR saw the highest 37 per cent rise in average

flat size to 1,890 square feet in 2023 from 1,375 sq ft in 2022. Anarock said that developers in the Delhi-NCR are actively tracking demand and launching larger homes. The demand is skewed significantly towards luxury apartments, which are primarily defined by bigger sizes. Hyderabad has the highest average flat size at 2,300 square feet, up 30 per cent from 1,775 square feet in 2022. In Bengaluru, the average flat size increased by 26 per cent to 1,484 sq ft in 2023 from 1,175 sq ft in the previous year. The average flat size in Pune saw an 11 per cent increase to 1,086 sq ft in 2023 from 980 sq ft in 2022. Chennai saw a 5 per cent rise in average flat sizes to 1,260 square feet in 2023 from 1,200 sq ft in the previous year, Anarock said.

Hsieh, Elise win Australian Open women doubles

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Hsieh Su-wei of Taiwan has become the second-oldest woman to win a Grand Slam doubles title after teaming with Elise Mertens of Belgium on Sunday to win the Australian Open women's doubles.

The second-seeded pairing of Hsieh and Mertens beat 11th seeded Jelena Ostapenko of Latvia and Lyudmyla Kichenok of Ukraine 6-1 7-5 in Sunday's final. It was Hsieh's seventh Grand Slam women's doubles title and Mertens' fourth, their second together. Hsieh follows Rohan Bopanna of India who became the oldest men's champion when he won



the men's doubles title Saturday with Matthew Ebden of Australia.

American Lisa Raymond was eight days older than Hsieh when she won the 2011 US Open women's doubles. Martina Navratilova was 49 when she won the mixed doubles at the 2006 U.S. Open with Bob Bryan.

Hsieh has the benefit of being coached by Australian Paul McNamee who won six Grand Slam doubles titles, including two Australian Opens and was the Australian Open chief executive until 2006. She already had taken out the mixed doubles at the current tournament with Jan Zielinski

of Poland.

Mertens won the Wimbledon title with Hsieh in 2021 and won the Australian Open title the same year with Aryna Sabalenka, who won her second straight singles title in Melbourne on Saturday. She also won the U.S. Open women's doubles in 2019.

Mertens will return to the No. 1 WTA doubles ranking on Monday, a position she first held in May, 2021. She has spent 28 weeks in the top ranking spot.

Hsieh and Mertens needed only 1 hour, 33 minutes on Rod Laver Arena on Sunday to pad their already impressive Grand Slam resumes. They

took the first set in just over half an hour. The second set was much tighter as Mertens lost her serve in the opening game. She recovered to serve for the championship at 5-3 but was broken again.

Finally, Hsieh and Mertens took the match when they broke Kichenok in the 12th game. Mertens leapt into the air in delight; Hsieh was more reserved.

They make a formidable combination, Mertens with the stronger serve, Hsieh with skillful touches around the net and flat, strong groundstrokes.

"It was a tough final," Mertens said. "The second set was

International kayaking tournament in Tawang from February 5 to 10

PTI ■ TAWANG

A six-day international kayaking tournament will be organised next month near India's border with China in Arunachal Pradesh on the fast-flowing Tawangchu river, in which two rivers from Tibet converge before it flows through Tibet to finally reach the Brahmaputra.

Beginning February 5, the "Tawangchu Tides" tournament will see participants experience heart-pounding thrills as they navigate the river's Class V rapids, according to a statement issued by the organisers.

The event is being organised under the patronage of



Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu and Union minister Kiren Rijju, who also belongs to the state, the organisers said, adding that the tournament will start from Lumla, near Tawang.

Tawangchu is the main river of Tawang. Strategically significant Tawang is located at an altitude of above 10,000

feet and is close to the border with China. Arunachal Pradesh shares a 1,129-km-long LAC with the Tibet Autonomous Region.

As many as 130 kayakers from across the world are expected to join the event, the statement said, adding, "It's not just a sport; it's a wild, unforgettable journey where

passion meets the untamed waters of Arunachal Pradesh."

The event will be witness to the kayakers' incredible skills and precision as they navigate a course filled with gates and obstacles. The race is a single lap of the course, according to the organisers.

"Experience the camaraderie of a global community, sharing a common love for adventure and conquering the Tawangchu river's thrilling rapids together," the statement read.

It said there will be nine competition categories, catering to every kayaking skill and style.

The entire Tawang district is known as the basin of the Tawangchu. Two fast-flowing



Korda takes 3 shot lead in LPGA Drive On Championship

AP ■ BRADENTON (US)

Hometown favourite Kelly Korda shot a 3-under 68 with an eagle-birdie finish Saturday to take a three-shot lead into the final round of the LPGA Drive On Championship.

Trying to complete a wire-to-wire victory at Bradenton Country Club, Korda rebounded with the late flurry after making consecutive bogeys on Nos. 7 and 8 in 10-15 mph wind with the temperature in the upper 70s.

"I'm actually kind of taken back with how much support I've been getting this week," Korda said.

"Being in Florida I always get a lot of support, but hometown, it's crazy. I was born just in the hospital just down the road from here. It's been nice seeing friends and family come out... Feeling the support."

The eight-time LPGA Tour winner was 13 under.

"It's a confidence boost knowing I can climb up the leaderboard and contend and stay in contention," Korda said.

"Definitely didn't have the great start today."

Coming off a victory in the Tournament of Champions, Lydia Ko was tied for second after a 69. Megan Khang (66) and Ayaka Furue (69) also were 9 under.

"It was really windy," said Ko, a victory short of entering the LPGA Hall of Fame.



Pavon is first Frenchman to win on PGA Tour since World War II

AP ■ SAN DIEGO

Matthieu Pavon became the first player to win a PGA Tour event under the French flag since World War II when he made an 8-foot putt on No. 18 at Torrey Pines South on Saturday for a dramatic birdie and a one-shot victory in the Farmers Insurance Open.

He raised his arms in celebration and shouted before hugging caddie Mark Sherwood after the putt rolled in as the municipal gem high above the Pacific Ocean glowed under the late-afternoon sun.

Pavon glowed, too. He said he almost quit golf 10 years ago because of the yips.

"It is big for our country," the 31-year-old PGA Tour rookie said.

"I hope it will inspire a lot of people, because coming from an amateur player which is 800 in the world to a PGA Tour winner is pretty big."

"I still can't believe it," said Pavon, who grew up playing soccer - his dad was a professional player - before switching to golf.

"It feels like there is another round to play tomorrow because we're only Saturday."

The Farmers ended Saturday to avoid going up against the NFL's conference championship games.

Pavon's final-round 3-under 69 put him at 13 under, one stroke better than Nicolai Hojgaard. Pavon was two shots ahead of Stephan Jaeger, who led after the second and third rounds, and Nicolai Hojgaard and Nate Lashley. French-American Martin Trainer won his first PGA Tour event at the 2019 Puerto Rico Open, an

Hockey5s Women World Cup

India lose to Netherlands, finish runners up

PTI ■ MUSCAT

India lost 2-7 to the Netherlands in the final to finish runners-up at the FIH Hockey5s Women's World Cup here.

Jyoti Chhatr (20th minute) and Rutuja Dadaso Pisal (23rd) scored for India in the summit clash on Saturday.

Janneke van de Venne (2nd, 14th), Bente van der Veldt (4th, 8th) and Lana Kalse (11th, 27th) struck a brace each for the Netherlands, while Sosha Benninga (13th) was the other goal-getter.

For their exemplary performance in the FIH Hockey5s Women's World Cup, Hockey India has announced a cash award of Rs 3 lakh for each player and Rs 1.5 lakh each for the support staff. Both the teams probed for their chances after the



start and it wasn't long before the Netherlands found an opening.

Janneke van de Venne took a long-range shot which deflected off the Indian goalkeeper Rajani Etimaru into the goal to hand Netherlands the lead. Moments later, Bente van der

Veldt found herself open in front of the Indian goal and smashed the ball into the net to double the lead.

A period of Netherlands dominance followed. Bente van der Veldt remained alert in front of the Indian goal as her quick overhead shot sailed past the Indian defence

into the goal.

With four minutes to go in the first-half, Lana Kalse pounced on a loose ball and unleashed a powerful shot to make it 4-0 in Netherlands' favour. Soon after, Sosha Benninga used a deft touch to bypass Rajani in goal and further extended their lead.

As the Netherlands continued to put pressure on the Indian defence, Janneke van de Venne capitalised on an opening and scored to end the first half 6-0 in the Netherlands' favour.

The Dutch dominance continued in the second-half, resulting in a challenge which was saved by Rajani.

India opened their account five minutes into the second-half as Jyoti found some space and struck a shot from distance to beat Netherlands' goalkeeper Kiki Gunneman.

Rutuja then received the ball under pressure, turned on a sixpence and breached Netherlands' goal to make it 6-2. As India started to pile on the pressure, a quick counter-attack goal from Netherlands' Lana Kalse restored their five-goal cushion.

Xavi will not continue at Barcelona after this season

AP ■ BARCELONA

Xavi Hernández won't continue as Barcelona's coach after this season, saying he can't get the team out of a slump. Xavi announced his decision on Saturday, minutes after Barcelona lost to Villarreal 5-3 in the Spanish league, leaving it 10 points adrift of leader Real Madrid.

"I would like to announce that on June 30 I will cease being the coach of Barça," Xavi said.

"As a Barcelona fan, I can't allow this situation to continue, we need a change of

course and of dynamics."

Xavi said he made the decision "several days ago," and although the hard defeat to Villarreal set the scene for him to announce the decision, he "would have made" it soon enough. He said he hoped this decision will decrease the stress and tension his team is enduring.

"The feeling of being the coach of Barcelona is cruel, it is unpleasant, you feel like you don't get the respect you deserve," Xavi said.

"It wears you down, affects your mental health, your emotions, up to the point that



you say you can't go on. My loved ones know that."

Xavi returned to Barcelona as the coach in November 2021 with his only experience a stint in Qatar. He has a contract through the end of next season.

The 44-year-old Xavi led Barcelona to the Spanish Super Cup title and the Spanish league title last season, the club's first trophies since the exit of Lionel Messi. The club mortgaged its future to help him do that by signing players like Robert Lewandowski. But Barcelona has struggled

this season and has shown severe signs of suffering as it collapse this month.

Barcelona saw its best two chances of getting a title in this campaign evaporate recently. Xavi's side exited the Copa del Rey quarterfinals after losing in extra time at Athletic Bilbao 4-2 on Wednesday, a loss that came two weeks after Barcelona was dismantled by Real Madrid in the Spanish Super Cup.

After the Villarreal debacle Xavi said his players' lacked the "maturity" to know how to hold onto leads, and after

the Bilbao loss he also underscored that he was playing with several young players. But that seemed at odds with the fact that his starting side was led with veterans like Lewandowski, Ilkay Gundogan and players in their prime like Pedri González and Frenkie de Jong.

Barcelona is set to play Napoli in the Champions League round of 16 next month. Xavi said he was still motivated to lead the team at what is no doubt a long-shot bid at ending his stint with a European Cup.

Barcelona loses thriller with Villarreal

AP ■ BARCELONA

Barcelona again showed it is not a championship-caliber team when it conceded twice in stoppage time to lose a 5-3 thriller with Villarreal in front of its stunned fans.

In one of the wildest games of the season on Saturday, Villarreal was up 2-0 then Barcelona roared back with three goals in a 12-minute span to lead 3-2 in the 72nd minute. But Barcelona's defense again let it down and new Villarreal arrival Goncalo Guedes leveled on a counterattack in the 84th. Striker Alexander Sorloth, who also set up two goals, then found the winner in stoppage time and José Morales added to Barcelona's misery. Barcelona was trying to bounce back in La Liga from



its elimination from the Copa del Rey at Athletic Bilbao this week. Instead, its loss to an erratic Villarreal only added more pressure on beleaguered manager Xavi Hernandez to turn things around.

Real Madrid rallied to win at Las Palmas 2-1 without top scorer Jude Bellingham and reclaim the league lead. It opened up a 10-point gap over Barcelona in third.

"This is a huge blow," Xavi said. "We lost this game because of our mistakes. Today is difficult to digest for me as a coach but also for my players, who are all feeling really bad."

"We did the hardest part

which was to turn it around, and we even had more chances to score, but that was when our problems started. We are paying a heavy price for our mistakes this season."

WHERE'S THE DEFENSE?

The Gerard Moreno opened the scoring near halftime from a pass by Sorloth. Former Barcelona youth player Ilias Akhomach took full advantage of horrible control by João Cancelo, who came on at halftime, to double the advantage.

Ilkay Gundogan pulled one back for Barcelona in the 60th. Substitute Pedri González took a second before an own goal by Eric Bailly put the hosts

ahead.

Barcelona then looked close to sealing it with a fourth goal before Sorloth launched Guedes on the flank to beat goalkeeper Iñaki Peña from an angle to make it 3-3. The Norway striker put Villarreal back in front after Barcelona failed to clear the ball from its area. "If you are losing 0-2 and then go up 3-2 you cannot give it away and lose like that," Barcelona midfielder Frenkie de Jong said.

"This cannot happen to an elite team."

Cancelo, like De Jong, backed Xavi and tried to take the blame as players.

"It truly was a disaster,"

Cancelo said.

"Those were the worst 45 minutes of my career." Barcelona's defense, which is missing injured goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen is falling apart in January. Barcelona was crushed by Madrid 4-1 in the Spanish Super Cup in Saudi Arabia two weeks ago, and on Wednesday it conceded twice in extra time to lose at Bilbao 4-2.

MADRID RALLIES

Vinicius Júnior and Aurélien Tchouaméni scored second-half goals for Madrid in the Canary Islands.

After a first half stalemate between the league's top defenses, midfielder Javi Muñoz put Las Palmas ahead in the 53rd from a pass by Sandro Ramírez. "We played a good first half against a great rival," Muñoz said.

Hartley hurts India on debut

England record memorable 28 runs win in 1st Test

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

The pushback started by incandescent Ollie Pope was given its perfect conclusion by debutant left-arm spinner Tom Hartley whose soul-ripping spell fashioned England's memorable 28-run win over India on the fourth day of the first Test here on Sunday.

India's chase of 231 went horribly south once Hartley (7/62) spun into India's top-order, igniting a rot that saw India getting bowled out for 202 in the final over of the day. England now lead the five-match series 1-0.

This is India's fourth defeat in home Tests since 2013 and first ever in Hyderabad (across two venues in the city).

India's approach during chase was in complete contrast to how Pope tackled Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja with a lot of intent. The spin twins have

never been lethal on surfaces which aren't exactly dustbowl and England's second innings batting show won't do their reputation any good.

"With a lead of 190 we were in control but exceptional batting - probably one of the best I've seen in Indian conditions, well played Ollie Pope. I thought 230 was gettable but it wasn't to be," India skipper Rohit Sharma said after the match.

Rohit's opposite number Ben Stokes termed it as his team's greatest win.

"Since I've taken the captaincy on, where we are and who we're playing against, it's 100% our greatest victory," Stokes said.

Earlier, Pope's brilliant 196 took England to 420 in their second innings, and gave them a substantial lead and genuine hopes of stretching India. And England did way more than stretching the hosts.

In fact, this defeat will leave a



deep burn in Indian hearts as they stumbled against a 25-year-old rookie Lancastrian with a combined experience of three international matches on a pitch that did not hide any demons.

There was appreciable turn and variable bounce but nothing this set of Indian batters could not have negated. Three dismissals showcased the travails of Indians on the day - Shubman Gill (0), Yashasvi Jaiswal (15) and Shreyas Iyer (13) fell to their own ineptitudes.

Jaiswal made a half-hearted charge against Hartley and the spinner pulled back his length after spotting movement of the batter. All the left-hander could manage was to spoon a catch to Pope at silly point.

Gill followed the suit two balls later in the same over. He made a hard-handed, indecisive push at the ball after Hartley tossed one around the off-stump. Pope

did the rest at silly point. Jack Leach, who is still not 100 per cent after taking a blow on his knee while fielding, dealt another telling blow to India's aspirations.

He produced a rather regulation ball that went across the right-hander from around the stumps, and Shreyas just poked the ball to Joe Root at first slip. It was just a nothing dismissal that encapsulated India's turmoil on the day.

India could have felt a greater pinch with Iyer's dismissal as he is one of the better-equipped batter in this batting unit to negate spin. In-form KL Rahul (22) looked all set for another impact innings, but Root pinned him on the back-foot as the batter attempted a whip on the on-side.

Rahul went upstairs after the on-field umpire gave him leg before, but the TV umpire too concurred with his distant colleague's decision.

Ashwin, Jadeja struggle on track that is not exactly dust bowl

PTI ■ HYDERABAD



Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja are India's stormtroopers at home, tossing over opponents like pioneer dolls and their numbers validate their supremacy too.

They started the Hyderabad Test against England with a combined tally of 500 wickets, one behind Anil Kumble and Harbhajan Singh.

Now, they stand on top of the Indian chart with 511 wickets and certainly in the company of all-timers such as Broad-Anderson (1039), Warne-McGrath (1001), Murali-Vaas (895) or Ambrose-Walsh (762).

Despite that lofty achievement and a fairly decent haul, Ashwin and Jadeja might not look back at the first Test against England with whole lot of fondness after visitors scored 420 in second innings at four plus runs per over. Yes, their six-wicket haul (6/156) in the first innings had played a significant part in India bundling out England for 246. Hence, it was natural for one to expect Ash-Jaddu to knock the stuffing out of England in their second innings, particularly after having established a huge 190-run lead.

At least, that's the set pattern over the better part of the last decade in home Tests. But there was a turn in the script here at the RGI Stadium.

England batters under Ollie Pope tightened their swash

in the second innings with a barrage of sweeps and reverse sweeps from the stump line to keep the Indian duo frustrated for an extended period.

There were glimpses of their magic such as Jadeja uprooting Jonny Bairstow's stumps with a straight one or Ashwin castling Ben Stokes with a sharply spun delivery.

But once Pope and England found their fight, the Indians forgot their own on a pitch that offered turn albeit the slower version. It wasn't the crumbling minefield from Rajkot a couple of years back.

In fact, head coach Rahul Dravid had offered a subtle caution. "It (The pitch) looks good one from what I've seen. It may spin a little bit. But how quickly and how fast, I am not sure," Dravid had said in a media interaction a few days back here. It panned out precisely that way as both Ashwin and Jadeja struggled to make an impact. Once Pope and even tailenders took the attack to them, they seemed a bit flustered.

Fully fit Chahar sets sights on T20 World Cup

PTI ■ MUMBAI



A challenging phase on personal front behind him, which sidelined him for a few assignments, India seamer Deepak Chahar is ready for a comeback and has set his sights on the T20 World Cup to be jointly hosted by the United States and West Indies later this year.

Chahar had to miss India's tour of South Africa in December followed by the home T20Is against Afghanistan after his father suffered a brain stroke, from which he has recovered now.

"For me, my father comes first. I am here only because of him. Whatever I have achieved is because of my father. If I am not there for him in those situations, then obviously, what kind of son I am?" Chahar told PTI in an exclusive interview.

"If the series was in India, then I would have surely tried to play. You can come to the hospital if you need within 4-5 hours. But obviously, (from) South Africa it takes 2-3 days to come back.

"It was an easy decision to be with my father -- any son would do that," he added.

Chahar said while he did not get a lot of time to train apart from doing fitness-related work, he went to the NCA to work on his readiness as he eyes a spot in India's T20 World Cup squad.

"I was with my father in the hospital for 25 days. He was not in Agra. He was admitted in Aligarh. We all had to stay there," he said.

"I was only able to do some exercises. I was not able to do any cricketing activities.

That's why I was not ready for the Afghanistan series. I had not practised for a month or so.

"After that I went to the NCA. I started my practice again and now I am fully fit. Everything is good. I trained really hard for the IPL and the World Cup," he added.

Chahar said there is extra motivation for him to push for his case for selection, given that he has missed the last two T20 World Cups due to injuries.

"I have missed two (T20) World Cups because of my injuries. If I was fully fit, I would have been a part of the World Cup team as well. In any scenario or (in) any team combination, there is always a requirement for a bowler who can bat at No. 7, 8, 9. I have done that and scored runs for

the Indian team," he said.

Mahi bhai should play for another 2-3 years

For someone who shares a special bond with Mahendra Singh Dhoni, Chahar said he credits the CSK captain for harnessing his career and giving it longevity, but does not want the legend's impending retirement to hit the side anytime soon.

"It took me 2-3 years to get comfortable around him (Dhoni). I see him as an elder brother and I think he treats me as a younger brother," he said.

"We have our fun moments. During lockdown, we played a lot of PUBG together. We played a lot of games together. We spent a lot of time together off the field. I've been lucky to learn so much

from him," Chahar said.

"I would say because of him only I got a chance to play for India because before that, he gave me a really big chance to play all the 14 games in IPL. In 2018, I played all the 14 games."

Chahar said Dhoni, who has been struggling with a knee injury for the last one year or so, should stop taking additional responsibility in the CSK set-up at this stage of his career and must look to enjoy his game.

"I personally think he has a lot to give to cricket. He can play for another 2-3 seasons. I have seen him bat in the nets. Obviously, he had an injury that anyone can have, people at 24 have that same injury that he has.

"He has recovered well. For me personally, he should play for another 2-3 years. (But) it's his call. He told everyone he is going to play his last game in Chennai. I think he will only decide. For us, it will be very difficult to play for CSK without him. Everyone has (always) seen CSK with Mahi bhai," Chahar said.

"He should not be taking it at this time because it is the end of his career. He should be enjoying not taking responsibility and pressure for the team. He has prepared so many cricketers like Ravindra Jadeja and other players, those who can do that job, they are good at it," Chahar added.

Chahar said players thrive when the environment is good in the team, citing similarity between Ranji Trophy-winning side Rajasthan in 2010-11 and 2011-12 seasons.

Himanshu four wickets put Delhi on cusp of improbable win

PTI ■ MOHALI

Stung by scathing criticism, skipper Himmat Singh pulled a beleaguered Delhi from the dungeons with a counter-attacking 194 before Himanshu Chauhan's four-wicket burst put them on cusp of an improbable victory over Uttarakhand on Sunday.

Having scored 264 for nine in their second innings, Delhi had Uttarakhand on the mat at 95 for six, chasing a target of 173. Uttarakhand need to score 77 on the final day with four wickets in hand.

After being bowled out for 147 in the first innings and then conceding a first-innings lead of 92, Delhi were left stuttering at 11 for five in their second innings with five of the top six back in the pavilion without troubling the scorers.

But Himmat, considered among the top two batters in the Delhi set-up, took it upon himself, adding 182 for the sixth wicket with keeper-batter Lakshy Thareja (43, 125), who played the second fiddle to perfection.

Himmat, who was batting on 109 after the second day's play, hit 27 fours and a six, with a lot of shots coming square of the wicket on the off-side.

After Thareja was dismissed, Himmat also added another 30 runs with Himanshu (16), who was lethal with the new ball once again.

Chasing a target of 173, it

was off-spinner Hrithik Shokeen, who got opener Avneesh Sudha caught by close-in fielder Arpit Rana before Himanshu removed Kunal Chandel (0), Yuvraj Choudhary (0) and Jiwant Singh (3) in quick succession.

Uttarakhand were reduced to 15 for 4 before Swapnil Singh (36) and veteran Aditya Tare (36) added 78 for the fifth wicket before Shokeen and Himanshu removed both by end of third day's play to put Delhi in driver's seat.

Brief Scores: Delhi 147 and 264/9 d (Himmat Singh 194, Lakshy Thareja 43). Uttarakhand 239 and (target 173) 95/6 (Aditya Tare 36, Himanshu Chauhan 4/19).

Sandeep set 388-run target for HP

Opener Sandeep Pattanaik scored 150 while Anurag Sarangi contributed 70 as Odisha scored 425 for eight in their second innings to set a target of 388 for Himachal Pradesh in another Group D game in Cuttack.

At stumps, HP were 33 for one with 355 runs required on the final day for outright win. HP, however, will want to ensure three points as they had a slender first-innings lead of 38. Odisha scored 138 in first innings while HP scored 176.

Brief Scores: Odisha 138 and 425/8 (Sandeep Pattanaik 150, Rishi Dhawan 3/82). HP 176 and (target 388) 33/1.

Joseph 7-68 inspires West Indies to a stunning 8 run win over Australia

AP ■ BRISBANE (AUSTRALIA)

Shamar Joseph braved a toe injury and grabbed 7-68 as the young fast bowler inspired the West Indies to its first win in Australia in 27 years in a gripping conclusion to the day-night test at the Gabba on Sunday.

Joseph, who hobbled off the field late Saturday evening when he was struck by a searing Mitchell Starc yorker from the final ball of West Indies' second innings, flattened Australia for 207 to give the West Indies a memorable win by eight runs.

Opening batter Steve Smith was left stranded with an unbeaten 91 off 146 balls as Joseph kept coming hard at the Australian batters with his pace.

"Shout out for my teammates for their support," Joseph told

broadcasters soon after masterminding West Indies' memorable win. "I wasn't even going to come to the ground today, but the doctor did something to my toe. I don't know what he did, but it worked."

The 24-year-old Joseph, who made his test debut at Adelaide where the West Indies lost by 10 wickets inside three days, sprinted towards boundary in joy as he clean bowled No. 11 Josh Hazlewood and leveled the two-match series 1-1.

"I just stuck to the basics," Joseph said. "I feel like we win the entire series by winning this test... I cried for my five-wicket haul but I'm so happy now. I'm not even tired. I would have kept bowling."

West Indies had not beaten Australia in a test match since it won by 10 wickets at WACA in 1997, and Cameron Green and



Smith well negotiated the first hour after they resumed the 216-run chase at 60-2 and raised Australia hopes of finishing the home test summer 5-0 after it routed

Pakistan 3-0 and also won the first test against the West Indies in dominant style.

But Joseph returned with a stunning spell of fast bowling to breathe life when he grabbed 6-

60 off an unchanged ten overs spell before the first session ended that left Australia still needing 29.

Joseph reached speeds of close to 150 kph (93 mph) and tore

through the Australian middle order in a breathtaking spell. He bowled Green (42) to break a 71-run stand before blasting through Head's defence with a superb yorker with his next ball while bowling the lefthander from around the wicket.

It was the second time in the match that Head was dismissed first ball.

Mitch Marsh (10) and Alex Carey (two) both came and went quickly as Australia wobbled and belief grew for West Indies of achieving a stunning upset.

Starc made a quickfire 21 before he became Joseph's fifth wicket when he was caught by Kevin Sinclair at cover. Cummins, who scored a career-high 64 not out in the first innings, could only manage two before he edged a ball through to Joshua da Silva with Australia still requiring 41

runs to win.

Smith and Lyon brought down the target to 29, but Alzarri Joseph had Lyon caught behind soon after the break, one ball after he couldn't grab a tough return catch.

Smith then played a superb lapshot for a six off Alzarri Joseph over fine leg and brought the target down to single digits.

But Shamar Joseph would have the final say as he uprooted Hazlewood's off stump with another pace delivery to seal West Indies' famous win amid wild celebrations by the tourists.

"Obvious disappointment after a loss but that was a fantastic test match and a fantastic series," Cummins said. "I thought in particular, Shamar, the way he bowled today, he was right up for it and unfortunately we weren't good

enough.

"I thought West Indies were fantastic. They outplayed us this week. Sometimes you always learn the lessons the hard way."

West Indies captain Kraigg Brathwaite said his team-mates got pumped up by former Australian cricketer Rodney Hogg's criticism, heading into the Gabba test.

"I must say we had two words that inspired us in this test match," Brathwaite said. "Mr. Rodney Hogg said that we were pathetic and hopeless. That was our inspiration. We wanted to show the world we're not pathetic. And I must ask him, are these muscles big enough for him?"

Brathwaite praised Joseph's brilliant fast bowling and said he came to know about Joseph's availability only an hour before fourth day's play.